HOME TOGETHER, HOME APART:
BOARDING HOUSE, HOSTEL AND FLAT LIFE IN
MELBOURNE c1900–1940

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Abstract

This thesis argues that non-family accommodation is an important but neglected aspect of Melbourne's urban history. Using the period 1900–1940 as a major focus, I argue that boarding houses, and later hostels and flats, were an important source of accommodation for many people for whom the detached house was unobtainable or inappropriate. The thesis suggests that these types of dwellings were unpopular with many of Melbourne's social and political leaders who regarded them and their inhabitants with intense suspicion, and attempted where possible to regulate and control them.

The thesis begins by arguing that the detached house has traditionally been seen as the only acceptable form of housing in Melbourne and Australia generally. As in other Anglo-Saxon based societies, the detached, preferably owner-occupied house was defined as 'home' and was and is seen as a mark of respectability and economic and social achievement. Boarding houses, and more especially flats, were viewed in many quarters as undermining these quintessentially Australian values. Hostels for 'business girls' – mainly established in the interwar years – were designed as a means of controlling female behaviour, and seen as providing a safe and respectable alternative to the boarding house and the unsupervised flat for young women without family ties in the city. Throughout the thesis, the idea of 'home' in the detached house, and the real and perceived experience of the boarding house, hostel and flat dwellers of Melbourne is compared and contrasted.

A second major sub-focus of the thesis is a comparison of Melbourne's experience in dealing with these dwellings and their inhabitants, and the similar, often contemporary experiences of other Australian and similar overseas Anglo-Saxon and New World cities.

Statement of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or institution. Except where due reference has been made in the text, to the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person.

Acknowledgements

The idea of undertaking a study of Melbourne's flats first came to me in the early 1990s when I was living in an interwar flat in St Kilda. The style of these flats and the people they were built for have long intrigued me, and when I decided to write a thesis on their social history my supervisor Professor Graeme Davison offered his enthusiastic support. He suggested, however, that a more rounded study might look at the dwelling options open to men and women whose lifestyles and occupations meant the traditional Australian house and garden was unattainable or unsuitable. I readily agreed and set out to find out about the dwelling options of these people. The resulting thesis is better for Graeme's encyclopedic knowledge of Melbourne's history and people. I thank him for his suggestions and friendship and support over these last three years.

has been enlivened by our numerous conversations and walks around both Sydney and Melbourne in the last ten or so years.

On a more personal level I'd like to express my debt to my family. My parents instilled in all their children a belief in the importance of education and achievement. I ignored their advice for many years, but as in most things they were eventually proven right. It is too late to thank my Father, but to Mum my sincerest thanks and warmest love. My brothers and sisters, and their partners and children inspire me, challenge me, make me laugh, laugh at me, and are a source of constant delight. To all, my love and thanks. A special thank you to my sister-in-law, Steva O'Hanlon who cheerfully and expertly reproduced the illustrations which appear throughout the text. Jim and Agnes Luckins have supported all my decisions to keep on studying and have been unstinting in their love and affection over the years. Again, many thanks.

To Tanja Luckins I can only say thanks. Her intelligence, wit and knowledge never ceases to amaze, and her love and support over almost two decades now has changed my life in ways I cannot begin to count. This thesis is improved no end by her incisive comments and photographic and artistic abilities.

Seamus O'Hanlon
March 1999

Introduction

In the most famous of his wartime radio speeches, Robert Menzies argued that one of the 'best instincts' in Australians is 'that which induces us to have one little piece of earth with a house and a garden which is ours, to which we can withdraw' at the end of the day. He claimed that the people who sought this house and garden were the 'backbone of this country' and suggested it was their efforts that ensured Australia's prosperity.[1] Menzies believed middle-class home-owners to be the 'Forgotten People' of Australian society, 'nameless and unadvertised', somehow caught in a squeeze between the very rich and the organised working class.[2] He also referred to what he called 'the petty gossip of so-called fashionable suburbs', suggesting that this was not the habitat of these 'forgotten people'.[3] Menzies, in effect, was stating that 'real' Australians – his people – lived in free-standing, owner-occupied houses in the residential suburbs of the state capitals, provincial cities, and country towns. His classification – almost certainly deliberately – excluded the flat and boarding house dwellers of the fashionable and not so fashionable suburbs of the major cities, who were a significant and growing section of Australia's urban population by the time of the Second World War.

At the 1947 *Census* – the first conducted after the Second World War – just on 3.8 million people, about half of the Australian population, lived in the six capital cities. Sixteen per cent of these – over 600,000 people – lived in other than private houses, that is in flats, tenements, hostels, boarding and lodging houses and other types of non-traditional dwellings. The number was highest in Australia's biggest city, Sydney where just under twenty per cent of the population lived in these places, and lowest in Adelaide, where it was only eleven per cent. In Melbourne the figure was just over 13.5 per cent, which was also about the average for the

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[1] RG Menzies, *The Forgotten People*, pamphlet published by Robertson and Mullens, 1942, as reproduced in J. Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*, Macmillan, Sydney, 1992, pp. 5–6.
[2] Ibid
[3] Ibid p. 7

other state capitals.[4] These figures were somewhat inflated by the housing shortages caused by the Depression and War, but still the question must be asked, why would an aspiring political leader deliberately exclude such a large proportion of the urban population from his definition of the people he regarded as the 'backbone of the nation'?[5]

The answer lies, I believe, in the deep ambivalence many Australians – especially the Non-Conformist Protestants socially dominant in Melbourne – have long felt about housing types other than the detached single family home. In Australia and other settler societies influenced by English cultural traditions, the detached house and the concept of 'home' came to be seen as exemplars of social and economic achievement, and home ownership the natural desire of most of the population. To be against these desires, or even ambivalent about them, was to be somehow 'un-Australian'. Australian cities are testament to these ideas, and symbolic of what Lionel Frost has described as the 'new urban frontier' – the vast urban agglomerations of detached houses built in Australasia and the west coast of North America in the late nineteenth century.[6] More accurately defined as suburban rather than urban in character, they are also symbolic of the primacy of the nuclear family in the New World, and of the attachment to the idea of the 'home' – what Menzies called *'homes human'*, where 'my wife and children are' (Original emphasis).[7]

Because flats and the boarding house represented unpleasant reminders of Old World communality and renting, rather than owner-occupation, Menzies and other Australian commentators were able to pretend to ignore their existence, or alternatively imply that they were a second-best housing solution. Richard Dennis and Richard Harris argue a similar case for Toronto which like Melbourne, was a

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[4] Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Census* 1947.

[5] Even more are excluded if the 48% of the population who were not home-owners are added. See J. Kemeny, *The Great Australian Nightmare*, Georgian House, Melbourne, 1983, p. 7.

[6] L. Frost, *The New Urban Frontier: Urbanisation and City–Building in Australasia and the American West*, New South Wales University Press, Sydney, 1991, p. 35.

[7] Quoted in J. Brett *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*, p. 8

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city dominated by Non-Conformist Protestants throughout much of its history. They claim that those who opposed boarding and later the building of multi-unit developments there invariably derided them as un-Canadian and attempted to associate them in the public mind with the tenements many Torontonians or their ancestors had fled in their native Scotland.[8] Advocates of 'Australian values' similarly denounced the notion of communal living, and saw the flat and the boarding house as scourges best resisted if our national life and character were to prosper.

This thesis is a study of boarding houses, hostels and flats in Melbourne in the period from around the turn of the twentieth century until the beginning of the Second World War. I aim to unveil aspects of the lives and lifestyles of the people who lived in these places and to explain their decisions to live in 'homes' other then the detached, nuclear-family-based norm. I also attempt to tell the stories of these people 'apart' from family ties, and to document some of the dwellings they inhabited. Similarly, the story of the people who owned or operated these places is told, in order that the history of the city's urban development be 'rounded out' from the accepted idea of Melbourne as city of homes and home owners. The thesis also juxtaposes the existence of boarding houses and flats with the received and self-image of Melbourne as a city in which the small detached house reigned supreme. The time-frame involved covers several distinct periods in the city's development, ranging from the post-1890s depression era and Federation, through to the Great War and its aftermath, modernisation and new forms of suburbanisation in the 1920s and 1930s, the Great Depression and its aftermath, and the years leading up to the Second World War.

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[8] R. Dennis, 'Interpreting the apartment house: modernity and metropolitanism in Toronto, 1900–1930', *Journal of Historical Geography* 20 (3) 1994, p. 308; Also see his, *Toronto's First Apartment-House Boom: An Historical Geography, 1900–1920*, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, Research Paper No. 177, Toronto, 1989; and his later 'Apartment Housing in Canadian Cities, 1900–1940', *Urban History Review/ Revue d'histoire urbaine*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2 (March 1998), pp. 17–31; R. Harris, 'The end justified the means: boarding and rooming in a city of homes, 1890–1951', *Journal of Social History*, Winter 1992, p. 339; Also see his *Unplanned Suburbs: Toronto's American Tragedy, 1900 to 1950*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996, esp. Ch. 5, 'The End Justified the Means'.

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In order to locate the development of these non-family dwellings, and in an to attempt to understand the concerns they aroused amongst some sections of the population, I begin the thesis with a discussion of the development of the idea of 'home' in Melbourne and similar Anglo-Saxon cities around the world. Historians have rightly characterised Melbourne as a city in which the detached, preferably owner-occupied, house inhabited by the nuclear family came to be seen as the natural habitat of most citizens.[9] They argue that this trait had been imported to Australia as part of the cultural baggage of a predominantly British and Irish-based settler community. I concur with these arguments and, as illustrated by Menzies' comments, suggest that the desire or need to live outside this norm was tolerated but hardly encouraged here.

The central focus of Chapters Two and Three will be the role played by boarding houses in providing accommodation for those people, usually single men and women, outside the traditional nuclear-family. Boarding houses were mostly accepted in the wider community, but seen as places in which young people stayed temporarily, usually in the few short years between being forced to leave the parental home for work in the city, and the later establishment of a new family home after marriage. Most boarding houses were located in the inner southern and eastern suburbs, and bear little resemblance to the sort of accommodation-of-last-resort we associate with the type today. Many were quite luxurious and well-appointed, and in the nineteenth century and into the early years of the twentieth, were the preferred residence of many well-to-do citizens, especially single and widowed women.

It is important to stress that there is a distinct difference between 'boarding' and 'lodging' houses. Common lodging houses were required to be registered in Victoria from 1854, and essentially provided low-cost nightly accommodation to the poor and the transient. A boarding house, on the other hand, was a place

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[9] For an overview of city and suburban development in Australia with a strong emphasis on Melbourne, see Lionel Frost, *New Urban Frontier*; Graeme Davison, 'Australia: The First

where tenants were sheltered for more than a week at a time and provided with meals as part of the tariff.[10] The legal and social difference between the two was that lodging houses tended to house a more transient population, for whom no meals were provided, while boarding houses were more 'respectable' places that provided longer term residence and at least some meals to their residents. Chapter Four discusses the gradual blurring of the boundaries between these two sectors in the interwar period and suggests that in the eyes of many commentators and the government, there came to be seen to be little difference between the two.

There have been few investigations into boarding in Melbourne or, for that matter, other Australian cities. Most that have been undertaken have looked towards the middle and bottom end of the market and seen the incidence of these dwellings as evidence of social decline and urban anomie. Historians have also studied th. more informal sector of the boarding and lodging market, in which families, o single, often elderly unmarried women or widows, take one or two boarders into their own home in order to supplement their incomes. In almost all of these studies, however, not only is there little mention of more well-to-do and permanent boarding house accommodation, but there also tends to be a conflation between the formal and informal sectors of the industry.

The 'high-class' and semi-permanent end of the boarding market is almost 'lost' from our history. Some of the better recent local histories recognise the role large former mansions played as boarding house accommodation after the boomtime 1880s, but local history societies and preservation bodies seem to regard this period and function as something to at best ignore, at worst obliterate.[11] This

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Suburban Nation?', *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 22, No. 1, November 1995.

[10] Victoria, 18 Victoria, *Common Lodging Houses Act*, 1854, [No. 8, 1854]; Victoria, 10 Geo. V, *Health Act*, 1919, [No. 3041, 1919].

[11] Of the former see J. Buckrich, *Melbourne's Grand Boulevard: The Story of St Kilda Road*, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, 1996, pp. 107ñ8; V. Peel et al. *A History of Hawthorn*, MUP in association with the City of Hawthorn, Melbourne, 1993, p. 259; S. Wilde, *The History of Prahran Volume II 1925–1990*, MUP, Melbourne, 1993, Ch. 2 'Housing High and Low in Prahran, 1920–1950'; On the latter see for example, City of South Melbourne and Ministry for Planning and Environment *South Melbourne's Heritage*, Melbourne, 1988, a guide to South Melbourne's heritage that virtually dismisses the role played by some houses in St Kilda and Queens Roads as guest houses as an unfortunate interlude. The entry for 'Airlie' at 452 St Kilda

thesis will focus on what were at various times known in the early twentieth century as 'first class' or 'high class' boarding or 'guest' houses. I emphasise this type of accommodation and this end of the market, not because of any distaste for the other type of accommodation, but because it illuminates the changing nature of accommodation offered to non-traditional, but still essentially middle- to upper-class households over the forty-or-so years of my study.

The second section of the thesis traces the development of a series of mostly church-based hostels around central Melbourne in the late teens and early-to-mid 1920s. Chapter Five points out that these were established in reaction to concerns about the decline in status of boarding houses They were a reaction to fears expressed by religious and other commentators about the opportunities and dangers posed by the freedom of city-life offered to the relatively large numbers of young women moving to Melbourne to take up work. These hostels were designed as safe and 'respectable' refuges for the many young women who earned their living in the city as jobs became available in the 'pink collar' and manufacturing industries then undergoing rapid expansion. They appear to have been especially popular with parents whose daughters were part of the migration to the city as employment opportunities dried up in country Victoria.

Flats are the focus of the third section of the thesis. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight are devoted to these places which existed in Melbourne before the First World War, but were mainly a phenomenon of the interwar years. The coming of flats to Melbourne was seen in some quarters as a disturbing example of the loosening of traditional social and living patterns, and was subject to scrutiny and denunciation by upholders of Anglo-Saxon dwelling traditions. The building of these flats and the lifestyles of their tenants were a frequently discussed topic in social and

Rd, for instance, devotes five sentences to its first thirty-three years, including two sentences to ownership by the father of Stanley Melbourne Bruce, but only one sentence to its twenty-seven years as a guest house. Similarly, the official publication celebrating the opening of the National Trust of Victoria's headquarters, 'Tasma Terrace' in East Melbourne, in 1979 devotes more space to the period 1886-7 to 1911, when it was a series of private houses, than to the 60-odd years it was run as a guest house. See National Trust of Australia (Victoria), *Tasma Terrace*, Melbourne, c1979; J. and P. Murphy Pty Ltd, 'An Architectural and Historical Study of Mansion Houses in St Kilda Road and Queens Road, and with Particular Reference to Armadale and Rath-gael', Report

architectural circles in interwar Melbourne, featuring in many stories in the daily papers and popular magazines, especially in the mid-to-late 1930s. Yet, excepting their architectural features, the role of the flat in Melbourne's urban history has largely eluded analysis.[12] I aim to redress that deficit.

This thesis is not meant to be a definitive study of all of non-detached dwellings in Melbourne. Instead, each section contains a series of 'snapshots' of dwelling types at different times that compares and contrasts these places with the idea of 'home' set out in Chapter One. Nor are the models of non-traditional dwellings and the lifestyles examined exhaustive. Throughout my period, men and women lived in a variety of dwellings other than the detached house. Many thousands lived in terrace houses and semi-detached dwellings across the inner suburbs. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I argue that these are essentially the equivalent of the detached house in that most were inhabited by single families. Those that were not were either boarding houses or tended to be let out as single rooms and thus conformed to the definition of 'lodging' houses under the 1854 *Common Lodging House Act* and the 1919 *Health Act*. Other people boarded or roomed in private houses or lived above their workplaces and businesses. Still others had rooms in city or suburban hotels (pubs) or were permanent guests at the more established hotels in the city and resort areas nearby. Some guests in these places were served all their meals in much the same way as were boarding house residents, but the 1919 and subsequent Health Acts specifically excluded them as they were covered by the provisions of the various liquor control acts and other legislative measures aimed at supervising and suppressing the availability of alcohol in Victoria.[13]

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to HBC, 1978.

[12] On Melbourne's development in the interwar period see Chapter One. On the architectural features of prewar flats in Melbourne, the standard source is Terry Sawyer's, 'Residential Flats in Melbourne: The Development of a Building Type to 1950', Unpublished B.Arch Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1982.

[13] The 1854 and subsequent *Common Lodging Houses Acts*, and the 1919 and later *Health Acts*, all specifically excluded licensed premises from control.

A third group lived in rooms and tenements, sharing bathrooms and kitchens and sometimes other communal facilities. These dwellings fell somewhere between flats and boarding houses in that residents lived independently, but did not have their meals provided. Commonly known as 'apartment houses' or 'chambers', these places were defined as lodging houses by the government, and so are mostly outside the bounds of this enquiry. Other people lived in accommodation provided by employers or institutions. Nurses, for instance, were accommodated in nurses' homes attached to the various hospitals, while teachers and police officers were sometimes put up in accommodation owned by the State. Some university and teachers college students stayed in halls of residence, or in hostels provided for them by their institutions or the government.[14] I have regarded these people as outside the bounds of this thesis because unlike most of the rest of the people studied, they were not responsible for finding and paying for their own accommodation.

Although the main focus of the thesis will be on Melbourne, a sub-theme throughout will be the experiences of Sydney and other Australian cities in dealing with boarding houses and flats during the same period. There have been several major studies of this market in Sydney over the years. This is mainly because it has always been a higher-density city than Melbourne and other Australian cities, and because flats there were more numerous and more obtrusive than elsewhere, even before the rapid growth of the high-rise sector from the 1960s onward.[15] One major study has been done on the social and architectural

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[14] At least one former St Kilda Road boarding/guest house, Warwillah, went on to become a hostel for student teachers and young teachers from the country, interstate and overseas, but this did not occur until the 1960s. See M. Lewis, Redholme, now Warwillah. 572 St Kilda Road, South Melbourne', Report to the Historic Buildings Council of Victoria (HBC), 1989, pp. 9–10; On Warwillah also see J. and P. Murphy Pty Ltd, 'St Kilda Road Mansions'.

[15] RW Archer, *The Market for New Multi-unit Housing in Sydney and Melbourne*, National Housing Economics Conference, Sydney 23–25 August, 1978; R. Thompson, 'Sydney's Flats: A Social and Political History', Unpublished PhD Thesis, Macquarie University, 1986; R. Cardew, 'Flats in Sydney: The thirty per cent solution?', in J. Roe (ed), *Twentieth Century Sydney: Studies in urban and social history*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1980, pp. 69–88.

aspects of Perth's interwar flats, but little work has been undertaken on boarding or interwar flats in other Australian cities.[16]

The thesis also compares and contrasts the Melbourne experience of boarding houses and hostels with that of cities in other Anglo-Saxon countries, especially those in Britain, the USA and Canada, which share many of our domestic and urban traditions. There is a growing literature on boarding, lodging and hostel-dwelling in these countries, although, as with the Australian experience, there appears to be a conflation in this literature between the formal and the informal sectors of the boarding and lodging market.[17] Similarly, the rise of the urban flat in these countries has been increasingly documented over the last decade or so.[18] In most major cities, the demand for flat and supervised and unsupervised boarding house accommodation in these countries similarly came from the growing number of non-nuclear family households. Their prevalence caused anxiety to many who remained attached to traditional ideas about appropriate housing and domestic life.

The widespread demand for these types of dwellings suggests they represented one outcome of the mobilisation and dislocation unleashed by the rise of Modernism and new methods of production, reshaping Western societies from the middle of the nineteenth century. The demand for these new forms of accommodation in Australia and abroad is also representative of changes in gender roles in the twentieth century, especially in the interwar period. Throughout this period, boarders and hostel and flat-dwellers formed an important sub-set of most cities' populations. For them 'home' was not a detached single-family dwelling but a semi-communal place apart. To fully understand the concerns these people and places raised in Melbourne, we need also to come to

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[16] J. Gregory and R. Taylor, '"The Slums of Tomorrow"? Architects, Builders and the Construction of Flats in Interwar Perth' in F. Broeze (ed), *Private Enterprise, Government and Society: Studies in Western Australian History*, XII, 1992, pp. 78–91.

[17] See Chapter Two.

[18] See Chapter Six.

terms with the idea of 'home' in the Anglo-Saxon world, and with the phenomenon of non-family dwellings presence in these places.

Map 1: Inner Southern and Eastern Melbourne in the 1930s.
Source: Sands and McDougall's, *Map of Melbourne and Suburbs*, 1935.

Chapter One

The Idea of 'Home'

Introduction

Like most Australians, Florence Taylor knew that there was all the difference in the world between a 'house' and a 'home'. Her weekly 'Home Building Section' in *Building*, the Sydney housing and architectural journal, was dedicated to the idea that a house was a collection of building materials whereas a home involved families, warmth and love. The sub-heading of her column asserted that 'Men make houses but women make homes'.[1] Almost a century later, Ross Thorne agrees, arguing that in his studies of late twentieth century Australian attitudes to housing, young people rarely think of their current (rented) dwellings as 'home'. For most young people '[h]ome, although they did not still live there, was their parents' home' where they grew up. He links this attachment to the family home to other ideas about the human need for a sense of location, associated with 'the security of the family group with overtones (subconscious memories) of what it meant to the person when a child – that is, warmth and security/protection of "belonging" to parents'.[2]

This distinction between a 'house' and a 'home' is a powerful idea in most Anglo-Saxon societies, especially in the New World. In their study of what domestic objects mean to individual North Americans, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton trace the origins of the word 'home' and suggest that it is an almost purely English-language term. Its has roots in Old Norse and

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[1] *Building* 1907–1921; For a discussion of Florence Taylor's life see Rob Freestone, 'Florence Taylor: the lady town planner of Loftus Street', *New Planner*, No. 6, December 1991, pp. 11–12; Andrea Jane Loder, 'Florence Taylor – Architect, Engineer, Town Planner – "The Great Lady of Sydney Town"', *Heritage Australia*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Winter 1989, pp. 43–4; Also see Michael Roe's comments on Florence in his discussion of her husband George Taylor's career in his *Nine Australian Progressives: Vitalism in Bourgeois Social Thought 1890–1960*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia 1984, Ch. 7, 'George Augustine Taylor: 1872–1928'.

Teutonic concepts which 'originally connoted both a safe place and a whole world'. They go on to argue that while other European languages have words similar in meaning to 'house', almost none are related to 'home', with its wider implications of familialism and a certain 'way of life'. Like Thorne, they link the idea of 'home' to childhood memories and feelings of security, if not nostalgia: 'It brings to mind one's childhood, the roots of one's being, the security of a private enclave where one can be free and in control of one's life'.[3]

David Sopher agrees and argues that the concept of home with its 'rich meaning' in English 'is virtually untranslatable into most other languages' and can 'refer with equal ease to [a] house, land, village, city, district, country or, indeed, the world'.[4] Peter Read also suggests that '[h]omes, like other places, are mentally constructed', and agrees that the term does not necessarily refer simply to a dwelling. 'To some', he writes, 'home is a comfortingly bounded enclosed space, defining an "other" who is outside', but it can also be 'a focus of memory, a building, a way of mentally enclosing people of great importance, a reference point for widening circles of significant people and places and a means of protecting valued objects'.[5]

Taylor, Thorne and Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton define the idea more narrowly. They argue that in the Anglo-Saxon New World, 'home' refers not only to a dwelling but to one of a particular type, the detached house on its own plot surrounded by at least some sort of a garden. Amos Rapoport attributes the Anglo-American and Australian attachment to the detached house to a belief in the idea that the home is 'a frontier and barrier', representing the power in these countries

[2] R. Thorne, 'The Meaning of Home in Australia', *People and Physical Environment Research*, 36, April 1991, p. 56–58.

[3] M. Csikszentmihalyi and E. Rochberg-Halton, *The meaning of things: Domestic symbols and the self*, CUP, Cambridge, 1981, p. 121.

[4] D. Sopher, 'The Landscape of Home: Myth, Experience, Social Meaning', in D. Meinig (ed), *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, OUP, New York, 1979, p. 130, pp. 129–149.

[5] P. Read, *Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places*, CUP, Melbourne, 1996, pp. 101–2.

of laissez faire ideals of self-help and getting ahead.[6] Rapoport also sees the fenced garden, especially popular in Britain and Australia as symbolic of 'the ideal that one's home is indeed one's castle, and...a belief in independence' that cannot be encroached upon.[7] Peter Saunders has found that in contemporary Britain this idea of the detached house with its own garden is still popular and reflects a rural idyll at the heart of the national consciousness, perhaps reflective of a distaste for the city and a desire to return to more bucolic times of 'thatched cottages and rural retreats' – a beau ideal.[8]

Graeme Davison argues that these beliefs were translated to Australia very early and that virtually since the time of European settlement, 'home' here has almost exclusively meant a detached house in the suburbs.[9] This chapter will draw out the idea of the 'home' in Australia and other Anglo-Saxon countries, especially those colonised and settled, at least initially, by English-speaking peoples. The aim is to locate the development of Australia's cities, and Melbourne in particular, in the model of New World urban growth set out by Kenneth Jackson, Graeme Davison and Lionel Frost, among others.[10] Like Frost, I see the Australian preference for the detached, preferably owner-occupied, house as being in part an outcome of comparatively good wages and working conditions, but along with Davison I would argue that this housing-type more fundamentally typifies 'those more elusive, and largely nonquantifiable, social, cultural, and political factors' representative of the aspirations of citizens of an immigrant nation, mostly populated, at least initially, by settlers from Britain and Ireland.

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[6] A. Rapoport, *House Form and Culture*. Prentice-Hall, Edgewood Cliffs, 1969. p. 134; Also see his *The Meaning of the Built Environment: A Nonverbal Communication Approach*, Sage Publications, London, 1982.

[7] A. Rapoport, *House Form and Culture*, p. 134.

[8] P. Saunders, 'The Meaning of "Home" in Contemporary English Culture', *Housing Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3, July 1989, p. 182.

[9] G. Davison, 'The First Suburban Nation?'.

[10] K. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, OUP, New York, 1985; G. Davison, 'The First Suburban Nation?'; and *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*, MUP, Melbourne, 1978, esp. Chs. 7 and 8; See also his 'The past and future of the Australian suburb' in L. Johnson (ed), *Suburban Dreaming: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Australian Cities*, Deakin University Press, Geelong, 1994, pp. 99–113; L Frost, *New Urban Frontier*.

Home can also, of course, be the site of oppression and violence, and is the major location of crimes committed by perpetrators known to their victims. But in this discussion I am referring to an ideal as much as a reality. Discussions of 'home' and the 'idea of home' are about perceptions and often centre on idealised notions on happiness and the perceived contentment of a certain 'way of life'. It is precisely these factors and the beliefs associated with them that caused the existence of boarding and lodging houses and later flats to become a contested aspect of urban development in Australia. These types of dwellings were necessary to house those who did not fit, or did not want to fit, the model of the nuclear family living in its own private, preferably owner-occupied, house in the suburbs. But were these actually 'homes' or simply places to stay? By offering unsupervised, mixed-sex, accommodation to single men and women, the boarding house and later the flat, represented a version of domesticity outside the model of the nuclear family. In Australia and elsewhere these groups had traditionally been portrayed as a potential threat to the stability of Australia's respectable family-based society.[11] The people who lived in these places were considered to be not only outside the norms of Australian household but also outside what were considered the normal aspirations of Australian society.

'Home' in Britain

Unlike their Continental European cousins, the British aristocracy were never city-dwellers. Their wealth was based on rural production and their preferred locale was the country house rather than the city apartment. Later, as the bourgeoisie began to become economically successful, they too attempted to set themselves up as country gentlefolk. Mark Girouard has commented on the long-noted desire of economically successful Europeans to invest their money in a country estate.

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[11] For a discussion of the importance of the nuclear family in Australia, and other 'fragment' societies, see among others, P. Grimshaw, 'Women and Family in Australian History', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 72, April 1979, pp. 412–421; P. Grimshaw et al, *Creating A Nation*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1994; Kerreen Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the home: Modernizing the Australian family 1880–1940*, OUP, Melbourne, 1986 (First published 1985), esp. Part 1 'Production'.

From the Middle Ages on, he argues, 'anyone who had made money by any means and was ambitious for himself and his family, automatically invested in a country estate'.[12] But this was far more common in England where prosperous merchants attempted to lessen the taint of 'trade' associated with their money by buying a country estate and aping the lifestyles of the aristocracy with their country seats and pursuit of rural pastimes. Girouard discusses the dilemma faced by the successful British industrialist in the Victorian period over whether to remain in the place where the wealth was created and based or 'to set out to establish [one's] family in the landed gentry'.[13] For many, he says, a 'socially ambitious wife or a son educated at public school, often effected the change', and a country house was either bought or built on the outskirts of the city, (hopefully) symbolising the arrival of the family into polite society.[14]

Robert Fishman also sees this link, but argues that the bourgeoisie held out against moving to the country until the rise of the idea of the nuclear family made 'even the most opulent merchant's house [which] was essentially open to the city' and provided little or no privacy to the family', socially unacceptable. The rise of the Evangelical Movement led by William Wilberforce in the late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century saw suburbia as the best place for a Christian family life to prosper. For much of the eighteenth century, however, successful city merchants used country houses as weekend retreats returning to their city workplace/residence during the week, but as the ideology of the family became more dominant, and the bourgeoisie became more socially and politically assertive, they began to use the suburban/country house as a symbol of 'the right of the merchant class to enjoy the same genteel culture as the aristocracy'.[15]

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[12] K. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, p. 53, quoting M. Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971, pp. 4 –5.

[13] M. Girouard, Ibid.

[14] Ibid, p. 4.

[15] R. Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*, Basic Books, New York, 1987, pp. 34 and 45.

In their study of the English middle-class in the period 1780 to 1850 Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall draw attention to the emotional attachment this group placed upon the idea of the home. They discuss the numbers of amateur and professional writers and poets who eulogised the home and contrasted it with the house which was a mere sheltering place, and 'could not be home unless it were the site of love and care'.[16] The love and care came, of course, from women who were to be the centre of the home, providing a shelter to children and a place of repose for the man of the house whose daily labours took him into the outside world. The home was especially idealised if it was in a rural area, or if that were not possible in the 'semi-rural' suburbs which were then becoming popular. The middle-class also increasingly valued the privacy afforded by the detached house marked by 'property boundaries with gates, drives hedges and walls around the house and garden'. Davidoff and Hall attribute the popularity of this type of dwelling to the 'inherent anti-urbanism' of this class.[17] The detached house allowed them the space to carry out the increasingly complex social rituals that were becoming the badges of respectability among this group, but also the new leisure activities such as 'reading, writing, music, fancy needlework, pursuit of scientific hobbies and the entertainment of friends' that labour-saving devices were allowing time for.

The idea of the home later became a Anglo-American ideal but was resisted by other nationalities, especially the French who 'decisively rejected' such a lifestyle, in favour of the urban apartment.[18] In 1844 Thomas Webster and Frances Parkes' *Encyclopedia of Domestic Economy* advised readers that in Britain the wish to reside outside the city in a home of one's own was 'the desire of every one whose finances can afford it'. But in 'other countries', they went on,

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[16] L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class, 1780–1850*, Hutchison, London, 1987, p. 180; On the ideal of home see also L. Davidoff, J. L'Esperance and H. Newby, 'Landscape with Figures: Home and Community in English Society', in J. Mitchell and A. Oakley (eds), *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1977 (First published 1976), pp. 139–175.

[17] L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 361.

[18] M. Girouard, *Victorian Country House*, p. 14.

even wealthy families are often contented to occupy a part of a large mansion, but this practice is inconsistent with those views of domestic comfort which an Englishman looks forward to at his own fireside, where he may plan his arrangements of a permanent nature without molestation.

This was allegedly a 'feeling...peculiarly characteristic of England', where the love of the home was greater than in any other part of the world.[19]

The architectural and landscape writer John Claudius Loudon had expressed similar views in the 1830s. He extolled the virtues of suburban residence as the 'ultimatum, in point of comfort and enjoyment, [for] the great mass of society; not only at present, but even after society has advanced to a much higher degree of civilisation, and to a comparative equalisation of knowledge, wealth, and taste'.[20] Loudon advised his readers that even if they could not afford to purchase a large country estate or even a villa on the edge of town, 'a suburban residence with a very small portion of land attached, will contain all that is essential to happiness, in the garden, park, demesne of the most extensive country residence'.[21] In 1891 RA Briggs extended the idea of the suburb as an urban equivalent of the farm further, suggesting that a 'Cottage is a little house in the country but a Bungalow is a little country house, a homely little place, with verandahs and balconies, and the plan so arranged as to ensure complete comfort with a feeling of rusticity and ease'.[22]

The home was central to the ideology of Evangelicals and later the romantics like John Ruskin who believed it should be a place of contentment and peace. The home should be overseen by the wife as a place of repose for the man of the house whose daily labours took him away each day:

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[19] T. Webster and F. Parkes, *An Encyclopedia of Domestic Economy*, London, 1844, quoted in D. Rubenstein (ed), *Victorian Homes*, David and Charles, London, 1974, pp. 26–7.

[20] JC Loudon, *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion*, Garland, London, 1982 (First published 1838), p. 10.

[21] Ibid, p. 8.

[22] RA Briggs, *Bungalows and country residences*, Batsford, London, 1891; See also J. Archer, *The Great Australian Dream: The History of the Australian House*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1996 (First published 1987), p. 155.

> This is the true nature of home – it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be a home; it is then only a part of that outer world which you have roofed over, and lighted a fire in.[23]

Ruskin's beliefs were a reaction to the distaste, even horror, he felt for the collapse of the old order in the face of Britain's Industrial Revolution. The home as he saw it, was to be a vanguard of traditional values and symbolic of humanity's link with the natural world. It was also to remain as a symbol of the British upper-class's traditional preference for the country over the city.

'Home' in North America

One of the most influential writers on New World societies in the last several decades has been Louis Hartz, who argued in 1964 that colonial societies in the Americas, South Africa and Australia, founded or largely settled in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, need to be viewed as 'fragments' of their parent societies, 'broken off' at a certain time and stage of political and social development.[24] In the case of North America those fragments initially represented persecuted religious groups, and subsequently the dispossessed of the earliest stages of the Industrial Revolution. In later years they also represented refugees from famine and poverty in Ireland, and then even later those seeking escape from poverty and pogroms in Continental Europe.[25] Scholars of American cities note the British distaste for the city was quickly transported across the Atlantic to the new fragment society established in the seventeenth century. Mark Girouard

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[23] JH Ruskin, 'Of Queen's Gardens', Lecture II, 'Sesames and Lilies Series', in E. Cook and A. Wedderburn (eds), *The Works of John Ruskin: Literary Edition*, George Allen, London, 1905, p. 122.

[24] L. Hartz (ed), *The Founding of New Societies: Studies in the History of the United States, Latin America, South Africa, Canada, and Australia*, Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc, New York, 1964.

[25] For a recent discussion of the development of North American cities, and the preference for the detached house see W. Rybczynski, *City Life: Urban Expectations in a New World*, HarperCollins, Toronto, 1995, esp. Ch. 1, 'Why Aren't Our Cities Like That?'.

argues that early Philadelphia was laid out with large plots for 'each settler to have a sizeable garden which often amounted to a smallholding' in order to feed themselves with home-grown vegetables and perhaps an animal or two. But he goes on to suggest that rather than just being a source of sustenance, these plots perhaps represented a 'conscious rejection of the big European city in favour of the "green country town", however much magnified over English examples, as a better place to live'.[26]

Kenneth Jackson traces this American desire for separate houses to a later period – the development of the cult of domesticity and privacy that crossed the Atlantic and reached its 'fullest development' in America 'in the middle third' of the nineteenth century.[27] Jackson links the belief in the idea of the detached house to the cult of the family that was also strengthened during this period:

> In countless sermons and articles ministers glorified the family...and they cited its importance as a safeguard against the moral slide of society into sinfulness and greed. They made extravagant claims about the virtues of domestic life, insisting that the individual could find a degree of fulfilment, serenity, and satisfaction in the house that was possible nowhere else.[28]

The detached house became the exemplar of the idea of the happy and holy home and by the middle of the century 'the ideal house came to be viewed as resting in the middle of a manicured lawn or a picturesque garden'.[29] Jackson suggests that 'Americans have long preferred a detached dwelling to a row house, rural to city life, and owning to renting', and that in 'the United States it is almost a truism to observe that the dominant residential pattern is suburban'.[30]

Other writers on the American city agree. Tamara Hareven sees the emergence of the 'home' and the belief in privacy as part of the development of the modern

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[26] M. Girouard, *Cities and People: A Social and Architectural History*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1985, p. 249.

[27] K. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, p. 48.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid, p. 55.

[30] Ibid, pp. 4 and 11.

family unit, especially amongst the middle- and upper-classes in Europe and America in the nineteenth century. She argues that as the workplace moved out of the home, it emerged 'as a specialized site for the family's consumption, child-rearing and private life', and as a consequence the home became a site of display of the family's wealth, status, and belief systems, through its architecture and furnishings. The home was at once a private retreat and a public display, and came to take on an 'enormous symbolic meaning, distinct from household', as a symbol of success and achievement.[31]

Several writers have linked the increased strength of the ideology of the home in the middle nineteenth century to the writings of architect Andrew Jackson Downing, and later the Beecher sisters, Catherine and Harriet. Margaret Marsh has attributed to Downing the idea that 'if a man could not be a farmer he could at least be close to nature, on his own plot of ground, in his own house'.[32] Catherine Beecher published several books under her own name, and *The American Women's Home* with her sister Harriet in 1869. Her books extolled the virtues of the home and women's central place in it. Marsh suggests that the 'central tenet' of Beecher's ideology was that 'the home, where women presided, was the central institution of American life, and the domestic role of women was the linchpin of social unity'.[33]

But so too was the ideal of the suburban house which was representative of the country's agrarian and republican past that many felt needed to be retained in the face of turmoil created by rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. The suburbs, according to Marsh, were seen to be a bulwark against the political and social pressures of these changes and 'were necessary for the nation's political health'.[34]

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[31] T. Hareven, 'The Home and the Family in Historical Perspective', *Social Research*, Vol. 58, No. 1, (Spring 1991), pp. 258–260.

[32] M. Marsh, 'From Separation to Togetherness: The Social Construction of Domestic Space in American Suburbs, 1840–1915', *Journal of American History*, Vol. 76, No 2, September 1989, p. 509; See also the larger discussion of these ideas in her *Suburban Lives*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick and London, 1990.

[33] M. Marsh, *Suburban Lives*, p. 12.

[34] Ibid, p.18.

Lionel Frost largely agrees and argues that these cities of small detached houses, represent a 'new urban frontier', mainly located in the American West and Australia. The style of these cities, he believes, is in part a product of land availability and transport innovation, but fundamentally, they represent the preferred housing choice of a people who preferred what they saw as the independence of the small holding. This was true of the relatively affluent working class of these places, who, as much as their middle- and upper-class compatriots chose to live in 'a suburban setting' rather than the higher-density terraces and tenements of the Old World and eastern New World cities, which were more overtly urban in orientation.[35] The 'new urban frontier' in other words was an attempt to fuse the country and the city together to create a new model of society based on what were believed to be the best attributes of both.

In Canada, a country that like Australia and the USA was established by the British, the idea of the detached house was also an important social and ideological symbol. Richard Dennis argues that Toronto took to the idea of the detached houses as its central tenet in the early twentieth century, referring to itself as 'Toronto the Good'. He argues that like the residents of most Canadian cities, Torontonians felt that it should be a city of homes, of 'single-family, owner-occupied dwellings'.[36] Richard Harris sees the detached, preferably owner-occupied home as the aspiration of middle- and working-class Torontonians. In his study of owner-building at the turn of the century, he notes that an enquiry into housing in Ontario called in 1919 for it to become 'possible for every Canadian family to have a convenient house substantially built, with sufficient ground to admit of ample light and air and in most cases to provide a garden plot'.[37] Harris argues that this fitted with the aspirations of working people, especially immigrants and their children, who 'agreed with reformers that the owner-

[35] L. Frost, *New Urban Frontier*, p. 22.
[36] R. Dennis, 'Interpreting the apartment house', p. 306.
[37] *Report of the Ontario Housing Commission*, 1919, as quoted in R. Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs*, p. 90.

occupied, single-family home was ideal'.[38] Similar claims can be made for other Canadian cities, especially Vancouver which Frost labels as one of his 'New Urban Frontier cities'.[39]

'Home' in Australia

In the Australian case, Hartz's fragment broke off not in one piece but, at various times and places 'for three-quarters of a century'.[40] The first was that dumped at Sydney in the late eighteenth century, which Richard Rosecrance suggests was representative of a strand of the lower levels of British and Irish societies, victims of the twin pressures of the Enclosure Movements and the early stages of the Industrial Revolution. Thus Sydney's earliest settlers tended to consist of the poorest and most destitute members of a rapidly changing British society. They brought with them the cultural baggage of a class that 'rejected the existing social order and which began to seek political remedies for its difficulties'.[41] Rosecrance sees in these people the earliest adherents to a radical political position that eventually emerged as a form of what he calls Australia's '"socialist" *laissez faire*' political and economic system.[42]

Grace Karskens has traced the Australian attachment to the free-standing house to these earliest years of the European occupation of Australia. Her study of Sydney's Rocks, perhaps the first suburb in Australia, found that its spatial form was almost a prototype for later urban development. Houses occupied by 'artisans, small traders, shopkeepers and labourers, married and unmarried couples', as well as the less reputable members of the population and people associated with maritime activities, bore distinct similarities with those of the middle and upper classes 'across the water' in Sydney proper. The houses were

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[38] R. Harris, *Unplanned* Suburbs, p. 110.

[39] L. Frost, *New Urban Frontier*.

[40] R. Rosecrance, 'The Radical Culture of Australia', in L. Hartz (ed), *Founding of New Societies*, p. 275.

[41] Ibid, p. 276

[42] Ibid, p.311.

> set apart with a garden at the front bisected by a path...Those keen to assert a claim over the land they occupied fenced these gardens in with the pointed palings commonly depicted in the paintings [of early Sydney]...The stout fences were also signs to others that the land had been appropriated not by deed, grant or lease but by de facto occupation.[43]

She goes on to argue that rather than early Sydney being 'an orderly outpost of empire, a gaol town, or a "gulag"', as some have suggested, it was fashioned according to the 'tastes, priorities and inclinations of the people', than the dictates of authority.[44] What she doesn't really explore, however, is why these people, who were from places where they could not simply stake out some urban territory and call it their own, decided that the most appropriate form of accommodation for themselves in Australia was the detached house surrounded by a fence. Why, in other words does this form of housing become so ubiquitous so early in this country? Karskens suggests that some Rocks' residents were interested in improving their social and financial status so it is interesting to speculate whether these types of houses represented an ideal to these people that was no longer possible in Britain as the Industrial Revolution began to exert its influence on the urban environment?[45]

Perhaps the answer is that among Sydney's early residents were also groups that saw Australia as a place of opportunity for material and social success possibly denied them in Britain. Rosecrance argues that this class, 'the exclusives' – mostly ex-officers and free settlers – was 'primarily interested in protecting its economic position', and establishing themselves as landholders and merchants.[46] Graeme Davison also comments on this group and argues that they were influenced by the Evangelical Revival in England and became the earliest Australian proponents of suburban living. It was these people and the earliest members of what was to

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[43] G. Karskens, 'The Dialogue of Townscape: The Rocks and Sydney, 1788–1820', *Australian Historical Studies*, 108, 1997, pp. 96–97; See also her larger study, *The Rocks: Everyday Life in Early Sydney*, MUP, Melbourne, 1997, Ch. 4, 'Patterns of Occupation'.

[44] G. Karskens, 'Dialogue', p. 112.

[45] G. Karskens, *The Rocks*, p. 11.

[46] R. Rosecrance, 'The Radical Culture of Australia', p. 282.

become the colonial elite who gravitated to the eastern shores of Sydney Harbour and built large country or suburban houses derived in part from the ideas that were ꞏ.... ꞏ.ꞏing popularised in England by Loudon and his associates.[47] Their houses may have been the model for the poor of the Rocks, and certainly became the basis for the spread of the suburban ideal throughout Australia.[48]

Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth were founded between forty and fifty years after Sydney, and their early histories reflect events in Australia, Britain and Ireland in those intervening years.[49] In Melbourne's case the first f.... ꞏn years or so after foundation in 1835 were a period of steady growth, albeit marked by outbreaks of land speculation. It was during this period that the detached house away from the town proper emerged as the goal of many colonists.[50] But after the gold-rush influx in the 1850s a new type of colonist emerged in what was now called Victoria. These were people who had been influenced by the Chartist movement in 1830s and 1840s Britain and brought with them to Australia some of the values of thrift, independence and social and political rights associated with this group. Rosecrance sees in this gold-rush generation a group of 'independent seekers of fortune, animated by the desire to improve their condition and status', including their housing. They were not, however, proto-capitalists in the strict sense, because their desire for material advancement was 'tinctured with reformism' and the demands of the 'People's Charter' for manhood suffrage and some worker's rights.[51]

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[47] G. Davison, 'First Suburban Nation', pp. 44–6; See also James Broadbent, 'The Push East: Woolloomooloo Hill, the first suburb', in M. Kelly (ed), *Sydney: City of Suburbs*, New South Wales University Press, Sydney, 1987, pp. 12–29.

[48] Richard White argues that suburbia and the 'Australian way of life' only really became a national obsession in the post-Second World War period, but I agree with Davison and others who put it much further back in our history. See R. White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688–1980*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1981, Ch. 10, 'Everyman his Holden'.

[49] R. Rosecrance, 'The Radical Culture of Australia', p. 275.

[50] On the Port Phillip District (Victoria) before separation in 1851 see P. de Serville, *Port Phillip Gentlemen and Good Society in Melbourne Before the Gold Rushes*, OUP, Melbourne, 1980: AGL Shaw, *A History of the Port Phillip District: Victoria Before Separation*, Miegunyah Press (MUP), Melbourne, 1996, and his 'The Founding of Melbourne', in P. Statham (ed), *The Origins of Australia's Capital Cities*, OUP, Melbourne, 1989, pp. 199–215; In the same collection see S. Priestley, 'Melbourne: A Kangaroo Advance', pp. 216–232.

[51] R. Rosecrance, 'The Radical Culture of Australia', p. 283.

If Sydney was the prototype suburban city, Melbourne became the exemplar. As early as 1841 Melbourne's 'first suburb' Newtown (Fitzroy), was described as offering its inhabitants the opportunity to leave the pressures and unpleasantness of the central city for the charms and delights of residences 'dispersed throughout the many lovely spots with which it abounds'. Newtown's villas were described as 'romantic' and 'secluded', yet the suburb was near enough to Melbourne to be accessible for daily work. It was also, however, far enough removed that

> so little of its noise is carried that way, that you might easily fancy yourself far away in the depths of the inland forest. But the greatest attraction is the open sward, that stretches up to every door, everywhere offering to the tread a short, firm carpet of verdure, a luxury of no small price to those whose daily labours lead them into the dust of the town.[52]

Writing in the late 1960s just as the major new emphasis on Australia's urban history began, Ian Turner argued that by 1851, just before the massive immigration of the gold-rush years, this non-urban style of living in detached houses had become the norm, or at least the desired norm, of Melburnians.[53] He suggested that the earliest years of colonisation in Melbourne set the pattern for its future sprawling growth and that by 1851, 'one characteristic pattern of Australian home-building had emerged: the quarter or one-sixth acre block'. Like Downing in America, Turner attributed this phenomenon to the desire of colonists to combine the city and the country, allowing them to seek 'light and air, and a chance to cultivate a garden, perhaps run a cow', while maintaining links with the city's social and employment opportunities.[54]

Graeme Davison largely agrees, arguing that 'Australia was born urban and quickly grew suburban', and that 'from the outset, Australia's founders anticipated

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[52] RD Murray, *A Summer at Port Phillip*, quoted in J. Grant and G. Serle (eds) *The Melbourne Scene 1803–1956*, MUP, Melbourne, 1956, pp. 38–9.

[53] I. Turner, 'The Growth of Melbourne' in JW McCarty and CB Schedvin (eds), *Australian Capital Cities: Historical Essays*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1978 (First published in PN Troy (ed), *Urban Redevelopment in Australia*, ANU, Canberra, 1968), p. 73

[54] Ibid.

a sprawl of homes and gardens rather than a clumping of terraces and alleys'.[55] He also sees the long Australian, especially Melburnian, attachment to the individual house as a product of the experiences of many of the nineteenth century inhabitants of our cities, who, before emigration, had perhaps lived and worked in the large crowded cities of Britain:

> The demand for land, for space and for independence have always been prominent in the aspirations of immigrants to Australia. Many looked back upon the experience of living as tenants in their homeland, and longed to be free of the fear of the landlord and the bailiff.[56]

The home, in other words was a symbol of the freedoms and opportunities at least theoretically open to the colonist. By the early 1880s about forty-five per cent of all Melbourne households had taken advantage of those opportunities and owned or were buying their own home.[57]

The suburban ideal became the social bedrock upon which Melbourne was based. The detached house away from the bustle of the metropolis was to be the model of the new society in the Antipodes. Lionel Frost argues that various international visitors to Australia, including Mark Twain, Richard Twopeny and Oscar Comettant, remarked on the colonial love of the detached house, and commented on the resultant enormous physical size of Australian cities, especially the most populous, Melbourne.[58] Twain said Melbourne 'sprawls around over an immense area of ground', and is 'a stately city architecturally as well as in magnitude'.[59] Twopeny wrote of the desire of 'the colonist' to live 'in his own house and on his own bit of ground' and that in most Australian cities and towns 'almost every

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[55] G. Davison, 'Past and future', p. 100; *Marvellous Melbourne*, esp Chs. 7 and 8.

[56] G. Davison, 'Past and Future', p. 102.

[57] G. Davison, *Marvellous Melbourne*, pp. 180–1; Tony Dingle and David Merrett put the figure at about forty-one percent in 1891 falling to under thirty-five per cent in 1911. See AE Dingle and DT Merrett, *Urban Landlords in Late Nineteenth Century Melbourne*, Monash Papers in Economic History, No. 1, Melbourne, 1975, p. 2.

[58] L. Frost, *New Urban Frontier*, p. 25.

[59] Mark Twain (Samuel L. Clemens), *Mark Twain in Australia and New Zealand*, Penguin facs. edition, Melbourne, 1973 (First published as *Following the Equator*, American Publishing Company, New York , 1897), p. 161.

class of suburban house is detached and stands in its own garden'.[60] Oscar Comettant, a visitor from France, and no great lover of the Anglo-Saxon tradition of residing outside the city proper, wrote of the size of Melbourne, and the difficulty he experienced traversing it for social and other engagements.[61]

Davison's study of Melbourne in the booming 1880s suggests that the suburban ideal became the mark of social respectability, especially for the middle-class.[62] He has shown that for most of Melbourne's middle-class, suburbia and all it stood for became the model of lifestyle perfection. The suburban home was to be a retreat from the hustle and bustle of the business-oriented city and was 'the soul's defence against the metropolis, the social mechanism by which personal values, expunged from the work-a-day world, established their own domain'.[63] It also became a way for the economically successful to assert their social and financial arrival. The grand towered mansion set in luxurious surrounds was the ultimate achievement but, as in Britain and America, the villa in Hawthorn, Kew or Brighton can be seen as the mansion or country house writ small, allowing the successful businessman to combine his need to be in the city near his workplace, with the social and health benefits of a rural life (Illustrations 1 and 2).

The home and the nuclear family were inextricably linked and predicated on the gendered division of labour, with the man of the house expected to go out to work in the 'bustling metropolis', while his wife tended his needs in the 'haven' of the repose that was the home. Some feminist scholars in Australia and overseas have long argued that the individual home is symbolic of patriarchal capitalism and its need for multiple rather than communal household goods is based on the desire of

[60] R. Twopeny, *Town Life in Australia*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1976 (First published London 1883), pp. 31 and 37.

[61] O. Comettant, *In the Land of Kangaroos and Goldmines*, translated by J. Armstrong, Rigby, Adelaide 1980 (First published 1888), Ch. 6.

[62] G. Davison, *Marvellous Melbourne*, Ch 8, 'A City of Freehold Homes'.

[63] Ibid, p. 137.

capitalists to increase the market for their goods.[64] As early as 1888 Catherine Helen Spence argued in favour of providing these goods communally in order to reduce the burden of housework and to channel economic resources into more socially productive goods and services. Under the 'haven' model the wife was expected to act as the 'angel of the home' supervising its operation and ensuring its smooth running so that her husband could exist in his retreat without disturbance. She was to be his helpmeet, with her only role to act as his support in the home while he went out into the world of business – the 'separation of spheres' identified by feminist scholars. Spence and others since have called for this to be abandoned, but even though the 'idea of the home' may have been based on gendered notions of society, it appears to have been popular with the majority of Australian women as well as men.[65] This ideal was, by definition, middle-class and required an income high enough and steady enough for a man to be able to sustain himself, his wife and their dependents comfortably.

Kerren Reiger's study of the modernisation of the Australian family in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, argues that the 'idea of the home' was particularly important to Australian culture. While the home was to be a 'haven' for men along the lines of the British tradition, in Australia it was also to be 'a

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[64] CH Spence, *A Week in the Future*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1987 (First published in *Centennial Magazine*, Sydney, 1888–9); See also G. Davison, 'Towards 1988', in G. Davison, J. McCarty and A. McLeary (eds), *Australians 1888*, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon, Sydney, 1987, esp. pp. 429–30; On more contemporary Australian criticisms of housework see Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle, *Gender At Work*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1983, Ch. 6, 'The labour process of consumption'; Also R. Pringle, 'Women and consumer capitalism', in C. Baldock and B. Cass (eds), *Women, Social Welfare and the State in Australia*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1983, pp. 89–107; On the few, and none-too-successful proposals to create communal domestic facilities in Australia see M. Bogle, 'A Domestic Revolution', *Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 42, September 1994, pp. 59–69; On consumption in American households and attempts to introduce communal forms of domestic production there see Ruth Schwartz Cowan, 'Two washes in the morning and a bridge party at night: The American Housewife between the wars', *Women's Studies*, Vol. 3, 1976, esp. pp. 163–5; Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighbourhoods, and Cities*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1981; For British examples see Matrix, *Making Space: Women and the Man Made Environment*, Pluto Press, London and Sydney, 1984, esp. Ch. 8, 'Private kitchens, public cooking', written by Marion Roberts.

[65] Patricia Grimshaw argues that the 'family' model of society became the norm in Australia very early, and that companionate marriage conducted in suburban homes was a lifestyle desired by men and women of virtually all classes. See her 'Woman and Family', pp. 419–420; Graeme

Illustration 1: The upper-class detached home in C19th Melbourne. Linden, Acland Street, St Kilda.
Source: SLV Pictoria Collection

Illustration 2: The detached middle-class home in C19th Melbourne. Rowe Street, North Fitzroy.

Illustration 3: The detached working-class home in C19th Melbourne. Campbell Street, Collingwood.

Illustration 4: The detached working-class home in interwar Melbourne. The Californian Bungalow, Blyth Street, Brunswick.

positive fountainhead of energy and righteousness' for a national life that was to be based on unlimited material and physical expansion.[66] She points out that commentators, including 'clergymen, politicians and other public figures' argued in favour of the detached, preferably owner-occupied home where the resident nuclear family would carry out 'naturally-ordained' gender-based roles. The 'ideological stress on the tranquillity and warmth of the domestic domain drew on desire, on nostalgia for memories of family and affection and the hope that love can be institutionalised in the home'. Reiger points out that had they cared to look, those who idealised the home may also have found 'ample evidence that domestic relationships were often far from blissful and the hearth a site of hard-pressed labour and bitter struggle'.[67]

This labour and struggle were especially evident in working-class areas north and west of the Yarra River where women had always undertaken paid labour either inside or outside the house. Nevertheless, the ideology of the home still exerted a powerful influence on attitudes in that part of the metropolis. Graeme Davison argues that the radicalism of the gold-rush generation blended with the self-improvement ethos of sections of the provincial British working-class to facilitate the emergence of friendly societies and building societies dedicated to helping their members achieve home ownership. The result was suburbs which were 'as much a filling out of respectable British working-class ideals as a filtering down of middle-class ones'. These suburbs were popular because they offered 'a new sense of privacy and proprietorship' to would-be upwardly mobile colonists who brought with them to Australia their 'British working-class traditions of self-help and cooperation'.[68] But what was notable about these suburbs was that unlike many of those in Britain or in Sydney for that matter, Melburnians often insisted that their houses should be freestanding on their own plot of land, even if that land

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Davison agrees and provides some of the evidence for Grimshaw's arguments. See *Marvellous Melbourne*, pp. 137–140.

[66] K. Reiger, *Disenchantment of the Home*, p. 37.

[67] Ibid, p. 39.

[68] G. Davison, 'First Suburban Nation?', p. 58.

often measured little more than similar blocks totally covered by terraced housing or tenements.

In his study of the working-class Melbourne suburb of Footscray, John Lack has linked this attachment to the small detached house to ideas of thrift, independence and material success in the New World. He argues that the increasing numbers of timber houses built in Footscray in the twenty years from 1870 reflected the demand coming from 'would-be owner-occupiers, workers and clerks with low incomes, or for landlords themselves of modest means'.[69] While block 'sizes varied considerably, reflecting the antiquity of many subdivisions, and the purchasers' incomes, Footscray workers' homes were almost invariably detached cottages standing on plots relatively generous by inner suburban standards'. The houses themselves were small, often only three or four rooms, but they 'represented a clear improvement over what they [the occupiers] and their parents had endured in the decades since the goldrushes', and presumably that of their grandparents' houses overseas. Lack goes on to argue that by the 1880s about sixty per cent of houses in Footscray were either owned or being purchased by the occupiers – 'levels [that] are the highest known in Melbourne and suburbs'.

Similar emphasis on home-ownership or at least the desire to rent a detached house, could be found in other working- and lower-middle-class suburbs. In Collingwood, Richmond, Northcote and Coburg detached weatherboard houses were the most common dwelling-type and home-ownership the aspiration at least of the steadily employed.[70] Collingwood perhaps provides the best example of the Melbourne preference for detached dwellings. Bernard Barrett's study of Collingwood's dwellings from the 1850s to the 1890s, shows they tended to be small and wooden, and therefore detached, whereas in Fitzroy for various reasons (including a ban on non-brick structures) houses tended to be brick and terraced.

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[69] J. Lack, *A History of Footscray*, Hargreen in conjunction with The City of Footscray, North Melbourne, 1991, p. 119–20.

[70] Geoffrey Bolton's study of his working- and lower-middle-class childhood street in Perth similarly stresses the importance placed upon home ownership. See G. Bolton, *Daphne Street*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Perth ,1997, esp. Ch. 4, 'Change and Consolidation'.

He produces figures to suggest that in the 1850s and 1860s the vast majority of Collingwood houses were wooden, although later some builders 'specialized in rows of attached houses, with party walls'.[71] Barrett also reproduces a photograph of Collingwood taken from the town hall tower in 1885 showing whole streets of the suburb dominated by detached single-storey houses on their own plots of land of not much greater dimension than that devoted to terrace houses. Tony Dingle and David Merrett's study of urban landlords in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries confirms a fondness for these types of detached single-storey houses among the workers of Collingwood, who appear to have preferred them to the often noisier and less-private terrace house (Illustration 3).[72]

Similarly, Richard Broome has pointed out that while in Coburg in the 1880s some quite grand houses were built for prosperous merchants and others, many more were built for ordinary folk. He notes that there was a preference for freestanding houses and points to a 'row of nineteen single-storey brick terraces along Sheffield Street north and the fine row of brick cottages with laced verandas in McCrory Street west [as] surviving examples'. But these brick houses were rare and while in 'the 1880s Coburg's housing stock grew from 398 to 1278', two-thirds were small weatherboards, almost all of which were detached and designed for families who had left the crowded inner city for suburban houses with land.[73] Richard Cardew and Ross King's study of housing in nineteenth century Australian cities also illustrates the preponderance of weatherboard, and therefore almost certainly detached, houses in Melbourne, as compared to Sydney. In the former fifty-seven per cent of houses were wooden and only forty per cent brick in 1933, while in Sydney, which was overwhelmingly built of terraces, seventy-five per cent were brick and only twenty-one per cent wooden.[74]

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[71] B. Barrett, *The Inner Suburbs: The evolution of an industrial area*, MUP, Melbourne, 1971, pp. 29, 145.

[72] AE Dingle and DT Merrett, *Urban Landlords*.

[73] R. Broome, *Coburg: Between two creeks*, Lothian, Melbourne, 1987, p. 146–7.

[74] R. Cardew and R. King, *Housing in Metropolitan Areas: Selected Statistics*, Ian Buchan Fells Research Centre, Sydney, 1970.

In the nineteenth century and into the twentieth there were some who rejected the idea of the home and sought to live a more communal or urban existence. But these people mainly did so either because they had no other choice and were unable to afford the idea, or because they valued the opportunities offered by localities such as East Melbourne, Parkville and parts of Carlton and South Yarra that consciously followed the urban traditions of parts of inner London.[75] Other people did not see themselves as part of the mainstream of society and chose to live what they felt to be a bohemian existence outside Australian norms. Some historians have argued that these groups saw themselves as antipodean *flaneurs*, attempting to emulate what they believed to be the lifestyles and manners of the Parisian *demimonde*. Sara Stephens sees the Melbourne Bohemians of the 1890s as self-consciously adrift from society's norms. Similarly Graeme Davison's study of Melbourne and Sydney bohemian life suggests that some artists and writers have attempted to create *salons* in the inner city, characterising themselves as urbanites rather than suburbanites in the Anglo-American and Australian tradition. Writers and journalists in Melbourne such as Marcus Clarke saw themselves as leading life outside the norms of bourgeois Protestant respectability and attempted to emulate in the Antipodes '*la vie Boheme* an exaggerated picture of literary Paris in the 1830s'.[76] Tony Moore has traced a century or more of an Australian 'Bohemian Tradition', largely based in the centre and inner areas of the two major capitals, Sydney and Melbourne, members of which saw themselves as rejecting the respectability and norms of suburban existence.[77]

But for most Australians in the nineteenth and twentieth century the 'idea of the home' remained a powerful ideology. In the interwar years, the idea and the dream of the detached owner-occupied house became more democratised, partly because

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[75] On the links between Carlton's layout and Bloomsbury see A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1975 (First published 1963), p. 280; On Parkville and East Melbourne see G. Davison, *Marvellous Melbourne*, p. 137.

[76] S. Stephen, '"Women, Wine and Song": The Bohemians of Melbourne', *Royal Historical Society of Victoria Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 3, September 1984, pp. 29–38; G. Davison, 'The European City in Australia', Unpublished 'Street Noises and Urban Spaces', European Studies Conference Paper, Melbourne, September 1998.

it was made available to thousands of returned servicemen and their families. Writing in 1952, the architect and critic Robin Boyd claimed that in the twentieth century, the detached suburban house became the Australian ideal: '[w]ith the exception of a few pair-houses, each new dwelling was now detached and isolated in its own private ground'.[78] In the interwar years the Victorian Government explicitly endorsed the idea of home ownership and the belief that these should mainly be detached houses on their own land. The 1920 Housing and Reclamation Act made low cost funds available through the State Savings Bank to allow for the lending of money to 'persons who do not have more than £400 a year in income and who do not own a house.' In the 1920s the bank lent finance to build more than 16,000 houses in Victoria, and according to one estimate influenced the design of more than half of the 70,000 or so houses built between the Censuses of 1921 and 1933.[79] The Bank built 7,000 houses for its customers, and almost another 4,000 houses for the War Service Homes Commission in Melbourne in the 1920s, all to its own specifications published in periodically updated design books.

These were nearly all designed along the lines of the then becoming popular Californian Bungalow-style, perhaps emblematic of the increasing importance of America, or at least the concept of 'America' in Australia in the interwar years (Illustration 4). Ann Stephen reports that by the 1920s American ideas were beginning to exert mass appeal in Australia as 'lavish' imported magazines such as the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *Ladies Home Journal* presented a picture of America to their Australian readers as a modern, sophisticated society based on

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[77] T. Moore, 'Romancing the City – Australia's Bohemian Tradition: Take One', *Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 57, 1998, pp. 172–183.

[78] R. Boyd, *Australia's Home: Its Origins, Builders and Occupiers*, MUP, Melbourne, 1961 (First published 1952), p. 70.

[79] A. Ward, 'The Development of Melbourne in the Interwar Years', Unpublished PhD Thesis, Monash University, 1984, Ch. 6, 'Building the New Suburbs'; R. Murray and K. White, *A Bank for the People: A History of the State Bank of Victoria*, Hargreen, Melbourne, 1992, Chs. 17 and 18.

consumer-oriented convenience.[80] Similarly Katie Holmes argues that in the interwar years the cinema exerted a powerful appeal to young Australians who attempted to model themselves on what they saw as the sophistication of America as exemplified by Hollywood. Young women were especially influenced by what they saw on the screen and attempted to emulate the lifestyles of their idols in dress and manners: 'The girl of the 1920s was "modern", self-consciously so, and film stars were her model'.[81] While this American influence was welcomed in many quarters, it was equally feared by those who believed Australia's British traditions were under attack from across the Pacific.[82] Many of the houses built in Australia in the interwar years were self-consciously styled on those believed to be popular in Los Angeles and California which allegedly like Melbourne had a Mediterranean climate.[83]

State Bank houses varied in size according to buyers' budgets and land values. Their size also reflected the decline in Melbourne's household populations in this period, which dropped from an average of 4.5 in 1921 to 4.1 in 1933, before

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[80] A. Stephen, 'Selling Soap: Domestic Work and Consumerism', in R. Francis and B. Scates (eds), *Women, Work and the Labour Movement in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand*, Labour History 61, Sydney, 1991, p. 63.

[81] K. Holmes, *Spaces In Her Day: Australian Women's Diaries 1920s – 1930s*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1995, p. 5.

[82] On American influences, especially Hollywood, and its opponents in Australia in the interwar years also see John Rickard, 'For God's Sake Keep Us Entertained', in B. Gammage and P. Spearritt (eds), *Australians 1938*, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon, Sydney, 1987, p. 362; M. Lake, 'Female desires: The meaning of World War II', in J. Damousi and M. Lake (eds), *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, CUP, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 64–5; S. Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia Vol. IV, 1901–1942: The Succeeding Age*, OUP, Melbourne, 1987, pp. 206–7; R. White, *Inventing Australia*, Ch. 9, 'Growing Up'; D. Collins, 'The Movie Octopus', in P. Spearritt and D. Walker (eds), *Australian Popular Culture*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1979, pp. 102–120; R. Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure: A History of Australian Popular Culture Since 1788*, Longman, Melbourne, 1995, esp. Ch. 6, 'Old Culture, New Culture, Towards the Re-alignment of Popular Culture, 1914–1945'.

[83] On 1920s housing in Melbourne see P. Cuffley, *Australian Housing of the '20s and '30s*, Five Mile Press, Melbourne, 1990 (First published 1989); F. Garlick, 'Melbourne's suburban expansion in the 1920s: with some emphasis on the changing role of local government', Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1984; S. Morrissey and S. O'Hanlon, 'Interwar Housing Survey, Section 2.1 Historical Overview', National Trust of Australia (Victoria), Melbourne, September 1989; S. O'Hanlon, 'Melbourne's Interwar Housing Survey', National Trust of Australia (Victoria), December 1989; B. Raworth, *Our Interwar Houses: How to Recognise, Restore and Extend Houses of the '20s and '30s*, National Trust of Australia (Victoria), Melbourne 1991, H. Zeeher, 'The Efficient Home: Domestic Design and Domestic Technology Between the Wars', Unpublished BA (Hons) Thesis, History Department, Monash University, 1996.

dropping below four in 1947.[84] In the southern and eastern suburbs houses were of two-or-three bedrooms plus a separate lounge and breakfast room, and in some cases driveways and garages. In the northern and western suburbs they were usually smaller with one-or two- bedrooms, and kitchens that served as breakfast rooms.[85] This State Bank program and the relatively prosperity of the 1920s saw Melbourne's level of owner-occupation and incidence of occupiers purchasing their homes increase by about four percentage points from just over forty-four percent at the 1921 census to forty-eight percent in 1933.[86] Higher levels were probably achieved in the 1920s before the onset of the Depression, although it is impossible to prove this as the figures are not available. There is no breakdown by district for these figures available in the censuses, but Anthony Ward's analysis of household tenure in two distinct socio-economic localities, East Malvern and West Coburg in the 1920s suggests that home-ownership was higher in the former, although both areas displayed higher rates than the metropolitan norm, mainly because they attracted young couples looking to buy their first home. Ward does note, however, that during the Depression the levels of home-ownership dropped considerably more in working-class West Coburg than in East Malvern, where residents were perhaps more able to withstand the ravages of the downturn and hence avoid the spectre of repossession that haunted more economically marginal buyers.[87]

In the twentieth century the ability to achieve residence in a detached home was not only democratised by government efforts to make money available for housing, but also by changes in technology. The wider availability of cars and motor buses made houses further than walking distance from the railway station or tram terminus more accessible to greater numbers of people. Similarly, the electrification of mass transportation made commuting quicker and cheaper.

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[84] *Census*, 1921–1947, *Victorian Yearbooks*, 1922–3, 1934–5, 1950–1.

[85] State Bank of Victoria Archives, Series 327–2–3, *Annual Reports*, 1931; See also P. Cuffley, *Australian Houses of the '20s and '30s*, pp. 18–19.

[86] Victorian *Yearbook*, 1925–6, *Census* 1933; It should be noted that the 1933 figure probably reflects a downturn in these levels as quite a lot of people had their houses repossessed during the Depression.

Within the home, technological changes such as the introduction of electricity made household tasks easier and able to be carried out individually, usually by women who were increasingly defined solely by their role as housewives.[88] The smaller houses of this period were a reflection of the need for a house to be managed by a housewife alone or perhaps with a day-help. The decline in the numbers of young women willing to work as servants made these smaller houses with their household consumer appliances necessities rather than luxuries.

From the 1920s, consumer goods became increasingly available as local and overseas companies set up manufacturing operations in Australia after the passing of the Tariff Act. The more expensive models of State Bank houses came with gas and electrical fittings as standard, while the cheaper ones had access points to connect these things. Tony Dingle's study of the electrification of kitchens in the interwar period notes that in Victoria about one third of all houses in areas reticulated for electricity were wired by 1922. He agrees that the growing shortage of servants meant that even in middle-class households women may have been forced to do their own housework without the aid of labour-saving devices. A major advertising campaign by electrical retailers and suppliers, however, attempted to convince them that these goods were becoming a necessity to replace home help, and allow her and her family to fully participate in the modern world.[89]

[87] A. Ward, 'Development of Melbourne', pp. 319–325.

[88] See K. Reiger, *Disenchantment of the Home*, pp. 52–4, and H. Zeeher, 'Efficient Home', passim; Similar changes were occurring in American and Britain at the same time. On the USA see R. Schwartz Cowan, 'The "industrial revolution" in the home: household technology and social change in the twentieth century', *Technology and Culture*, 17, 1976, pp. 1–23; R. Miller, 'The Hoover in the garden: middle class women and suburbanization, 1850–1920', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 1, 1983, pp. 73–87; On technological changes in American and British homes see S. Bowden and A. Offer, 'Household appliances and the use of time: the United States and Britain since the 1920s', *Economic History Review*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 1994, pp. 725–748.

[89] T. Dingle, 'Electrifying the Kitchen in Interwar Victoria', *Journal of Australian Studies*, Number 57, 1998, pp. 119–127.

The Idea of the Garden

The idea of the home was also inextricably linked with the belief in fresh air and the importance of maintaining a human link with nature and the natural world. The detached house appealed for a number of reasons, perhaps the most important of which was the garden, which recalled a rural-past unsullied by the vices and anomie of the industrial city. Davidoff and Hall note that in eighteenth and nineteenth century England the garden was linked with the idea of domesticity and the home. 'In both image and practice', they write, 'the garden setting of the villa proclaimed the values of privacy, order, taste, and appreciation of nature in a controlled environment'. Gardens could be places for family relaxation or they could be sites where children could learn about science and nature or where a woman could engage in light labour growing plants and flowers for her house.[90]

The same was true in America where, as we have seen, some writers argue that the suburb was considered a second-best option if the nation was not to be totally rurally-based. Tamara Hareven has also noted that the detached house represented a small rural holding transplanted to the city – a 'rural retreat from the city *within the city*' (original emphasis). The garden 'with its hedges, gates, and walls' therefore became an important symbol, 'providing an illusion of serene pastoral settings'.[91] Kirk Jeffrey agrees that the language used to describe the home represented a 'debased' pastoralism, and that middle-class Americans 'regarded the most important feature of the ideal home as its location in ordered natural surroundings'.[92] Robert Fishman suggests this belief in nature still survives in America. He argues that 'the influence of the aristocratic country house survives even today' and in America and Britain, there is still an 'implication that the land

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[90] L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 369–375.

[91] T. Hareven, 'Home and Family', p. 263.

[92] K. Jeffrey, 'The Family as Utopian Retreat from the City: The Nineteenth Century Contribution', *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, No 55 (1), Spring 1972, p. 25.

around a suburban home is not simply pretty space but the sign of superior social and economic status'.[93]

In Australia, Judith Brett has argued that Robert Menzies explicitly linked his pitch to the 'forgotten people' in their suburban retreats to the British idealisation of rural life and the concept of the village. She suggests that he deliberately attempted to recall the values of pre-industrial family life with his concept of 'homes spiritual'. This was a powerful idea in both Australia and Britain and deliberately evoked an image of the hostility 'between the virtues of the simple-family-centred country life and the corrupt modern city'. Menzies, she writes, recognised, that 'the dream of an independent yeoman farmer underlay many an Australian suburban home.[94] Brett argues that Raymond Williams and others have explicitly drawn parallels between the British preference for suburbia and their idealisation of the country over the city.

Graeme Davison and Tony Dingle also suggest that Menzies' 1949 election policy speech attempted to appeal to a rural ideal, by drawing attention to his claim that the 'best people in the world' are those who through their own efforts 'hope one day to sit down under their own vine and fig tree, owing nothing to anybody'.[95] George Seddon has made several attempts to understand the importance of the garden to generations of Australians. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he argues, the back garden was a site of domestic labour for both men and women. For women it was where they dried clothes and perhaps grew vegetables for the family, while men used it to chop wood or used their shed to create or simply tinker about. The back yard was also where children could play in relative safety under the watchful eye of either or both of their parents. Today,

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[93] R. Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, p. 45.

[94] J. Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*, p. 51.

[95] Quoted in G. Davison and T. Dingle, 'Introduction: The View from the Ming Wing', in G. Davison, T. Dingle and S. O'Hanlon (eds), *The Cream Brick Frontier: Histories of Australian Suburbia*, Monash Publications in History No. 19, Melbourne, 1995, p. 5.

however, he suggests that the garden has lost most of its utilitarian purpose and is now essentially used as a place of leisure and display of wealth and status.[96]

Twentieth century town planners and urban commentators criticised terrace houses and high-density housing by arguing that Australia, with its abundant space, sunshine and light, should strive for open space, and that each family should have access to its own garden. The horrors of the First World War and the sacrifices made for the nation led many progressives to call for improved housing for the betterment of the Australian 'race'. Journalist, town planner and later official war historian, Charles Bean wrote in 1918 that Australians should strive for their own detached homes and that

> every house should have its garden (so much so that it would be worth while to make a law of it and remit the tax on gardens). It means everything in the world for the health and spirit of the children that they should have this home life.[97]

He called for this to remain the case and suggested that we should strive 'for all we are worth' to maintain 'the individuality and variety of our home and family life'.

Cultural commentators have also noted the Australian and wider Anglo-Saxon belief in the benefits of the garden. Michael Crozier has written that the garden, especially the private suburban garden, allows the citizen to retain not only his/her privacy but to '"take the air", however limited it may be'. He argues that the garden acts as an intermediate area, beyond the hearth and the domestic sphere

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[96] G. Seddon, 'The Australian Back Yard', in I. Craven (ed), *Australian Popular Culture*, CUP in association with *Australia Studies* and the British Australian Studies Association, Cambridge, 1994, p. 23–4; This article and others on similar subjects were enlarged and expanded in his recent collection of essays, *Landprints: Reflections on place and landscape*, CUP, Melbourne, 1997; Hugh Stretton has similarly suggested the backyard is used by parents to supervise children's play. See his *Ideas for Australian Cities*, Orphan Books, Adelaide, 1971, Ch. 2, 'Australia as Suburb'.

[97] CEW Bean, *In Your Hands, Australians*, Cassell and Co, London and Melbourne, 1919, pp. 72–3; See also Paul Ashton's discussion of the town planning and social ideas of Bean and others including George Taylor and J. D Fitzgerald, '"This villa life": Suburbs, town planning and the new social order 1914–1929', in R. Freestone (ed), *The Twentieth Century Urban Planning Experience: Proceedings of the 8th International Planning History Conference and the 4th Australian Planning History/Urban History Conference*, UNSW, Sydney, 1998, pp. 19–24: Also see his history of Sydney planning, *The Accidental City: Planning Sydney Since 1788*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1993, Chs. 2 and 3.

and hence a semi-public space, but still behind a fence representing private property:

> The paling fence may mark title, but the garden suggests a more sociable sense of place – a place beyond both the industrial edifice and the boundary of domesticity.[98]

Susan Hosking follows this argument in her discussion of Australian women gardeners, suggesting that cultural commentators have traditionally seen gardening as an especially suitable domestic occupation for women, as it involves 'an extension of...nurturing skills' and the creation of new life. But gardening was also an extension of the domestic sphere to the outside world and offered women who wished it, a chance to engage in the public sphere. A 'woman's garden represents a buffer zone between the confines of the house and the hazardous territory outside', but it also represents for many, 'a reaching out, a glorious extension into the world, and the opportunity for assertion of female rights and values'.[99]

Conclusion

The desire to live in a detached house is part of the Australian mindset, which as in America, equates the detached owner-occupied dwelling with achievement, success and contentment. Home ownership has traditionally made some economic sense as most houses have increased in value and have traditionally had tax benefits such as not being subject to capital gains or imputed rents taxes. But detached houses do not necessarily make rational economic sense for developers or buyers attempting to gain a toehold in an expensive housing market. They are extravagant with land and building materials and require owners to invest in multiple services such as hot water and gas supplies that are more economically provided communally. But attempts to live more communally go against particularly strong historical forces in Australia. It may be more economically-rational and architecturally-logical to provide shelter and household services in

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[98] M. Crozier, 'The Idea of the Garden', *Meanjin*, 47 (3), 1988, p. 398.

this way, but only a minority of Australians have ever shown any great willingness to partake of such dwelling options. From Catherine Helen Spence onward feminist critiques of the single family home have attempted to argue the case for these things to become communal, thus saving costs and female labour.[100] But these appeals have largely fallen on deaf ears, and Australians have clung to the belief in the single family home. Most have agreed with Florence Taylor's dictum that dwellings other than these places can never really be 'homes'.

But there has always been a minority for whom 'home' has been a boarding house, hostel or flat. Most lived in these places out of necessity, mainly because their short-or-long-term circumstances meant that life in a family dwelling was either impossible or inappropriate. In Melbourne, and around the rest of Australia for that matter, urban commentators and housing advocates have believed that life in anything but the detached house was by definition a second-best choice that should be tolerated but not necessarily encouraged, lest it undermine our national life. Boarding was tolerated because it was seen as a temporary phase of life applicable mainly to young men forced to move away from the family home for employment reasons. It was also regarded as acceptable because young men tended to board with families, and were usually treated as extended family, looked after by women as surrogate family members. They were, in effect, drafted into the detached family home model.

In the interwar years when societal and economic changes made new employment and lifestyle opportunities available – especially to young women – boarding and other forms of more communal living arrangements came under extreme criticism. As the number of people seeking access to non-family accommodation increased in the twentieth century concerns arose about who lived in these places and why they were doing so. At all times these people were a minority of the population, and their need for shelter was felt to be temporary. Most Australians assumed that these people, especially the young, would go on to become members of nuclear

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[99] S. Hosking, '"I 'ad to 'ave me Garden": A Perspective on Australian Women Gardeners', *Meanjin*, 47 (3), 1988, pp. 439 and 445.

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families living in detached houses either as home-owners or tenants. The majority did, but a sizeable minority lived in non-family accommodation for years on end.

The rest of this thesis is a study of the short- and long-term housing solutions available to these people 'apart', and compares the reality of their living arrangements with the negative connotations put on them by those who believed in the sanctity and benefits of the detached house in its own garden. For these people 'home' was not the detached house, but nevertheless for them the boarding houses, hostels and flats of Melbourne provided shelter – and in some cases – the warmth and love, deemed by Florence Taylor and others to be the defining characteristic of 'home'.

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[100] See CH Spence, D. Hayden and Matrix above.

Chapter Two

Boarding and Lodging Houses in Melbourne 1900–1940

Introduction

In the late 1990s we equate boarding houses with the poor and the dispossessed – the last refuge of those who can find no other form of accommodation.[1] In the early part of this century, however, boarding houses provided accommodation for between five and ten per cent of Melbourne's population, including the rich and famous. Boarding houses were written up in the pages of newspapers and the exploits of their residents regularly reported in *Table Talk* and the social pages of the daily and weekly press. Toorak House in Toorak, for example, was described as a 'fashionable boarding-house' in *Table Talk* in 1911, while St Leonards in St Kilda advertised itself in 1910 as 'an ideal city home', suitable for both the 'theatre goer' and 'businessman' visiting Melbourne.[2] The linking of the terms 'fashionable', 'businessman' and 'boarding house' seems scarcely comprehensible today, yet in the first decades of this century, boarding houses were an acceptable, even desirable form of accommodation for people newly arrived in the city, or for those without the opportunity or desire to maintain a house for themselves. Usually run by women, boarding houses provided safe and respectable shelter, daily meals, as well as laundry and other housekeeping services, mainly to younger men, but also to a wide variety of tenants including couples, single women, and families unable or unwilling to cater for themselves in their own private dwellings.

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[1] L. Luxford, 'Boarding and Lodging-House Accommodation Project', in National Conference on Homelessness, *Homelessness in the Lucky Country 1996–2000: How will we meet the challenge?*, Council to Homeless Persons, Melbourne, 1996, pp. 84–99; 'My Place', *Sunday Age*, 28 September 1997; 'A room to call home', *Age*, 18 November 1996.

[2] *Table Talk*, 10 August 1911; 'St Leonards, St Leonards Avenue, St Kilda', advertising brochure, c. 1910, National Trust of Australia (Victoria) File No. 513, St Leonards.

Contrary to popular opinion, and to the views of most academic research on the matter, boarding houses were not the same as common lodging houses which, as their name suggests, were never regarded as respectable, and acted as little more than cheap sleeping accommodation for the working-class and the poor. Lodging houses catered to the more transient members of society outside the norms of the nuclear family, and those economically unable to find more permanent accommodation. Their clientele was predominantly male and included itinerant workers and sailors in the city between jobs or ships. Lodging houses also provided shelter to the low paid and those whose work required them to live near wholesale and retail markets, wharves and other sources of temporary employments. A subsidiary group were the unemployed and the poor whose incomes precluded them from establishing themselves in regular accommodation. Board and lodging was also informally provided in private homes, although the numbers involved in this industry remain unknown as it was an unregulated and discreet industry.[3] Common lodging houses, on the other hand, were required to be registered with local authorities in Victoria from 1854 onward. The *Common Lodging Houses Act* of 1854 – one of the earliest aspects of private life in the newly separated colony to be supervised by the government – initiated the supervision of these places and enforced their registration with local councils.[4]

This regulation in Victoria occurred almost simultaneously with the enactment of a variety of similar laws in Britain that Lenore Davidoff suggests were part of a concerted effort by the government to contain and control the lives of the poor and the transient. She sees such legislation as a reaction to the increased 'revulsion' felt by the British middle- and upper-class toward the lifestyles and living arrangements of the poor, who were struggling to cope with the ravages of

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[3] Max Kelly makes a rough estimate of Sydney's entire boarding and lodging population in the early teens as something in the order of '15 to 20 per cent of metropolitan Sydney's adult population'. In this figure he includes the seven per cent who were formally boarders or lodgers and the between eight and thirteen per cent who were informal boarders with families. The former figure is from the 1911 *Census*, while the latter is deduced from 'less reliable but nonetheless useful sources – literary digests, diaries, newspapers, court records and the like'. See M. Kelly, *Faces of the Street: William Street Sydney 1916*, Doak Press, Paddington, 1992, p. 58.

[4] Victoria, *Common Lodging Houses Act*, 1854. Note this is before responsible government was granted in 1856.

the Industrial Revolution. The *Common Lodging Houses Act* of 1852–3 was an important watershed in British social history because for virtually the first time it allowed government authorities to reach into and violate the sanctity of the private home.[5] Davidoff points out, however, that this and most similar pieces of legislation made efforts to exclude the middle-class from its scope. No definition of what constituted a lodging house was included in the Act, but because British tradition reified the private family house, and to ensure the middle-class home remained sacrosanct, 'this type of draconian measure could only be taken against what were presumed to be the larger lodging houses'. Indeed, an 1887 report on the workings of the Act suggested that it did not apply to 'private hotels and houses let to the upper and middle classes'. The Act did, however, give police and local authorities the power to use their discretion to decide for themselves whether or not to take action against particular households and, according to Davidoff, some poorer people taking in lodgers found 'themselves open to inspection and regulation' if the behaviour of themselves or their lodgers happened to come under notice.[6]

The Victorian Common Lodging Houses Act can be similarly seen as a reaction to an increase in the numbers of transients, although in this case it was the gold rush rather than the industrial revolution that caused the large influx into Melbourne and the wider colony. The Victorian Act was not as broad in its scope as the British model and defined what constituted a Common Lodging House, classifying it as 'any house tent or edifice not being a licensed public house in which any number of persons besides the occupying tenant thereof his or her family and domestics ordinarily sleep paying hire or reward for being allowed to do so'.[7] This provision would also technically enable the authorities to encroach upon any house that contained lodgers, but in practice it was also probably aimed

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[5] L. Davidoff, 'The Separation of Home and Work? Landladies and Lodgers in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century England' in S. Burman (ed), *Fit Work For Women*, ANU Press, Canberra 1979, pp. 71–2. In Victoria a Health Act was also passed at about the same time, Victoria, 18 Victoria, *Health Act*, No. 13, 1854.

[6] Ibid, p. 72.

[7] *Common Lodging Houses Act.*

at the lower end of the market. In a New South Wales Parliamentary Report on common lodging houses in the mid–1870s, members of the Select Committee and various witnesses were concerned that any potential controls should protect private houses and respectable boarding house keepers from undue interference by the authorities. The Health Officer for Sydney noted that he felt it 'would be very hard for respectable people to find the Inspector of Nuisances coming and looking over their premises every day'. In regard to monitoring the arrangements of the 'common class of house', on the other hand, he felt that no amount of interference and control would be too much 'if you want to suppress crime and disease'. [8]

In Victoria, boarding houses remained free from government inspection until 1919, when a new Health Act brought them under the control of local municipal authorities. This Act defined a 'boarding house' as any house or building in which more than five persons exclusive of the proprietor thereof are lodged or boarded for hire or reward from week to week or for more than a week'. 'Common lodging-houses' retained the definition given to them under the 1889 Public Health Law amendment in which they were defined as any house or dwelling 'in which persons are harboured or lodged for hire for a single night or for less than a week at one time or any part of which is let for less than a week at a time'.[9] Essentially, then, the 1919 Act confirmed the traditional difference between boarding and lodging houses in which the latter tended to house a more transient population for whom no meals were provided, while boarding houses were more permanent places that provided at least some meals to residents. Boarding houses also tended to be more 'respectable' and better appointed than lodging houses, although as we shall see in Chapter Four the differences began to blur in the public mind as the century wore on.[10]

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[8] George Darney, Health Officer for Sydney, *Report from the Select Committee on Common Lodging Houses Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Appendix*, NSW Legislative Assembly, Parliamentary Papers, 1875–6, p. 11.

[9] Victoria, *Health Act*, 1919.

[10] For a discussion of the facilities made available in boarding houses see Chapter Three.

Boarding Houses in Australia and Elsewhere.

There have been few detailed studies of boarding in Australia or other Anglo-Saxon-based societies. Those that have been undertaken tend to look toward the middle and bottom end of the market and usually conflate three aspects of boarding – boarding houses, lodging houses, and board and lodging in private homes, into one overarching classification. But as we have seen, there were both legal and social differences between the boarding and lodging house sectors. The third component of this market is more difficult to trace and define. This was the informal sector, in which families, or single – often elderly or unmarried – women or widows, took one or two boarders into their own home, fed them and treated them virtually as extra members of the nuclear family. The extra tenants provided both company and supplementary income. In most cases these tenants were not registered, and often the income not declared for taxation or welfare purposes.[11] Because most commentators on boarding and lodging conflate the three sectors, for the purposes of this historiographical discussion I will do the same. Writers on lodging here and overseas link the three sectors together but recognise that they are very different. It would be difficult, therefore to mention individual studies focussing on one without mentioning the other.

Lenore Davidoff points out that commentators on boarding and lodging have usually associated the practice with urban decay. They have seen the transition from single-family housing to multiple accommodation as evidence of neighbourhood decline and succession. This follows the Chicago School of Urban Sociology model of the city as a series of concentric circles or zones inhabited by different social and ethnic groups who move into a neighbourhood, succeeding an older group, before also moving up the social ladder to more desirable locations within the city or its suburbs. According to this model, the oldest districts of the city, especially near wharves and railway stations, became a 'zone of transition', a

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[11] Davidoff argues that in Britain up until the First World War, middle-class women 'left without means of support', would describe the extra member of their household as a 'PG' (paying guest),

temporary home to each new wave of local and foreign-born arrivals in the metropolis. These new arrivals were accommodated in boarding, rooming and lodging houses, often established by the earliest arrivals from their ethnic or national group, before moving on to better accommodation as their economic situation improved. They, in turn, were replaced by the newest group to arrive in the city. As most of the first arrivals were often young single males, these areas or zones – often not without good reason – gained a reputation for drinking and vice. Partly as a consequence of this behaviour, boarding, rooming and lodging was conflated in the public mind, and that of sociologists and many historians since, with vice and transience.[12]

Graeme Davison has drawn links between the 'zone of transition' model and the Australian experience of boarding and lodging in studies of Melbourne and Sydney in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In a discussion of the role of the city in helping to create the Bush legend he suggests that some of the major writers of the *Bulletin* school 'lived alone in lodgings' in the cities in the 1880s and 1890s, finding it a disillusioning experience that reinforced their

in order to soften the 'idea of taking strangers into the house for cash', 'Separation', p. 85

[12] On the Chicago School of Urban Sociology model of zones of transition see EW Burgess, 'The Growth of the City: An Introduction to a Research Project', in R. Park, E. Burgess and R. McKenzie (eds), *The City*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1970 (First published 1925), pp. 47–62; O. Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People*, Grosset and Dunlap, New York, 1951, esp. Ch. VI, 'The Ghettos'; Paul F. Cressey, 'Population Succession in Chicago: 1898–1930', in James F. Short (ed), *The Social Fabric of the Metropolis: Contributions of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1971 (Article first published in *American Journal of Sociology*, 44, No. 1 (July, 1938), pp. 109–119; See also O. Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880–1920*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1982; For an up-to-date critique of the model, and its use and abuse since the 1920s see R. Harris and R. Lewis, 'Constructing a Fault(y) Zone: Misrepresentations of American Cities and Suburbs, 1900–1950', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 88 (4), December 1998, pp. 622–639; There is a wealth of evidence of this type of chain migration of immigrants in nineteenth and early twentieth century Melbourne. On the former see amongst others G. Davison, 'Introduction', and C. McConville, 'Chinatown', in G. Davison, D. Dunstan and C. McConville (eds), *The Outcasts of Melbourne: Essays in Social History*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1985, pp. 58–68; On immigration, accommodation and succession among non-British migrants in early twentieth century Melbourne see F. Lancaster Jones, 'Italians in the Carlton Area: The Growth of an Ethnic Concentration', *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. X, No. 1, April 1964, esp. pp. 88–92; C. Price, 'Jewish Settlers in Australia, 1788–1961', *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal*, 5 (8), 1964, esp. pp. 396–409; Also see A. Inglis, *Amirah: An Un-Australian Childhood*, MUP, Melbourne, 1983 for her family's early days in rooming houses in North Carlton and Brunswick before joining the movement of Jews to St Kilda in the late 1930s;

romantic view of the bush. He argues that many of these writers lived in Sydney's squalid boarding house district located 'between the terminal areas of the waterfront and railway station and the central business district' that covered the social gamut 'from the high-class boarding houses on Dawes Point' to the 'notorious skid-row of seamen's lodgings in lower George and Clarence Streets'. Melbourne's boarding houses showed similar traits, but were less numerous and less conspicuous than those in its northern rival. In both cities, however, Davison argues that the bush writers created the bush myth by contrasting the behaviours they observed in their daily lives in these places with what they saw as the more homely and supportive virtues of the bush.[13]

Davison has also studied Melbourne's nineteenth century boarding and lodging houses as part of a larger study of the city's outcasts. As with his previous study, he traced the locations of these places and again argued that they were associated with the 'zone of transition', being initially concentrated at the western end of the city centre, near the Immigration Depot, before later moving to 'new quarters in the neighbourhood of Lonsdale and La Trobe Streets'. He suggests that in the early years of Melbourne's settlement these first places conformed somewhat to the Chicago model, being of a fairly low standard and acting as passing-through points for new arrivals on the way to more traditional domiciles. Later establishments were an improvement, but even so in the late nineteenth century new arrivals who were looking for more permanent and salubrious accommodation or were in Melbourne on business were advised in traveller's directories 'to look in West or North Melbourne, South Carlton, Fitzroy or East Melbourne; university students in Carlton, and those on business with the government in Spring Street, South Nicholson Street or East Melbourne'.[14]

The keeping of formal boarding houses by Australian women has also attracted the attention of feminist historians. Most have pointed out that until relatively

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On the same subject see Monique Schwaz's 1996 documentary, *Bitter Herbs and Honey.*

[13] G. Davison, 'Sydney and the Bush: An Urban Context for the Australian Legend', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 71, October, 1978, p. 193.

recently, managing these places was one of the few employment options available to women such as widows and unmarried daughters left without 'financial support from families and husbands'. Boarding or lodging house keeping were regarded as minor extensions of women's traditional domestic role. Katrina Alford has argued that, being home-based, such activity was seen as both 'compatible with women's work in raising children' and an acceptably 'genteel occupation for women unused or unprepared to work outside the home as domestic servants, or indeed inside their own home taking in washing or sewing'.[15] Alford has also briefly looked at the informal sector of boarding, undertaken in the private home and suggests that this was of 'less economic value', than full boarding house keeping, mainly because it usually went undocumented. Nevertheless she suggests that the taking in of boarders supplemented family incomes and added 'considerably to women's financial and social independence' within the family.[16]

In her study of twentieth century boarding, on the other hand, Jill Julius Matthews concentrates almost entirely on this informal home-based sector. She argues that because this type of work was mostly undertaken by women, and 'existed in the shadows of the commanding economy', it 'has attracted little attention or analysis' from historians. She, too, conflates the different types of boarding and lodging but sees all three as a 'curious phenomenon indeed within the terms of the domestic ideology of the gender order', because it involved the turning of the private home, the haven from the world of commerce, into a business itself. It also involved opening the domestic sanctuary of the private home to strangers, for a price.[17] Matthews goes on to argue that this type of boarding was based on fairly informal arrangements, rarely involving the registration of the boarder as a paying guest, thus avoiding attention from the authorities and the tax system.[18] This

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[14] G. Davison, 'Introduction', pp. 5–13.
[15] K. Alford, *Production or Reproduction?: An economic history of women in Australia, 1788–1850*, OUP, Melbourne, 1984, p. 196.
[16] Ibid.
[17] J. Matthews, *Good and Mad Women in Twentieth-Century Australia*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1987, (First published 1984), pp. 162–3.
[18] Ibid.

informality also allowed some sort of non-business relationship based on friendship or mutual support to develop between the landlady and her guest, although ultimately the bond remained fundamentally commercial because 'a boarding house was not a home – for the boarder'.[19]

Local historiàns have studied the boarding house in various parts of Melbourne. Like Alford and Matthews, Sally Wilde writes of the importance running a boarding house, or simply taking in one or two boarders, had for women – especially those without male support, in the various parts of Prahran earlier this century. Susan Priestley has argued along similar lines, suggesting that in nineteenth and early twentieth century South Melbourne, the 'comforts of home, traditionally provided by women, were as likely to be sought by lodgers and boarders as by a householder's immediate family', and that the taking of 'a room in a private household [was] a common practice in South Melbourne up to the 1940s'. Janet McCalman briefly alludes to the role played by delicensed hotels in providing boarding house (more often lodging house) accommodation in Richmond, while Lynne Strahan suggests a similar role for some of Malvern's larger grand nineteenth century mansions as their owners struggled to keep them viable in the early twentieth century.[20]

In their history of Hawthorn, Victoria Peel, Deborah Zion and Jane Yule also discuss the re-use of large nineteenth century buildings as boarding houses, by tracing the transition of the imposing Hawthorn Coffee Palace in Burwood Road from its early days as a grand coffee palace, to a less well-to-do temperance hotel and finally to its nadir as a disreputable boarding house in the 1920s and 1930s. Judith Buckrich suggests that in the same period St Kilda Roads 'guest houses' provided 'accommodation to the businessman' in town, whereas in St Kilda proper, the market tended toward the 'seasonal holiday trade'. Anne Longmire

[19] Ibid, p.165.

[20] S. Wilde, *The History of Prahran*, pp. 55–61; S. Priestley, *South Melbourne: A History*, MUP, Melbourne, 1993, pp. 137–8; J. McCalman, *Struggletown: Private and public life in Richmond 1900–1965*, MUP, Melbourne, 1985 (First published 1984), photograph between pp. 36–37; L. Strahan, *Private and Public Memory: A History of the City of Malvern*, Hargreen in Association

largely agrees, suggesting that by the 1930s St Kilda's guest houses were mainly catering to 'holiday makers' who came to see its 'famous attractions, and enjoy the innocent pleasures of its fairground, gardens, beaches, dance-halls and theatres'. [21]

Like most other commentators, these local histories tend to conflate all forms of non-familial boarding and lodging accommodation into one type, so there is little differentiation made between not only the formal and informal sectors of boarding, but also between the status of the different boarding house types. The one exception to this rule is Sally Wilde who suggests that within Prahran 'the pattern of letting rooms in some form or another affected all areas and all social classes':

> There were common lodging houses where working-class men and the unemployed could rent a bed and make do as best they could for the rest. There was the solid respectability of bank clerks boarding in Armadale. And there was the spacicus existence in upmarket establishments like Illawarra on St George's Road. [22]

This variety of boarding types may be a reflection of Prahran's unusual blend of the very rich and the quite poor, but I suspect that the other municipalities also contained within their boundaries a cross-section of the boarding and lodging market.

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with the City of Malvern, North Melbourne, 1989, p. 60.

[21] V. Peel et al, *A History of Hawthorn*, pp. 109–110; J. Buckrich, *Melbourne's Grand Boulevard*, p. 107; A. Longmire, *St Kilda, The Show Goes On: The History of St Kilda Vol. III, 1930 to July 1983*, Hudson, Hawthorn, 1989, pp. 2–3; Jim Davidson argues that Fitzroy became a popular spot for boarding houses from the 1880s when the elite took advantage of the new railways and began to move out to the further suburbs. Fitzroy's larger houses such as Osborne House then became 'superior boarding houses' for a time but 'with the decline of Fitzroy as the twentieth century progressed', so too did the status of its boarding houses. See J. Davidson, 'Osborne House', in Cutten History Committee of the Fitzroy History Society (eds), *Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1989, p. 114. By the time of my study most of Fitzroy's former boarding houses were operating as rooming or lodging houses. The same is probably true of North and West Melbourne by the twentieth century, and soon became the case for Richmond, as McCalman notes in *Struggletown*.

[22] S. Wilde, *The History of Prahran*, p. 58; A study of South Australia's nineteenth century boarding house sector also looks at the broad range of accommodation types available, but without much detailed analysis of any of them. See S. Magrison, 'Board and Lodgings in South Australia 1836–1939', Unpublished M.Litt Thesis, ANU, 1992.

Max Kelly and Jane Lydon have separately produced studies of boarding and lodging in Sydney in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Kelly's study of William Street, Darlinghurst in 1916 is based on photographs taken just before the street was widened, and provides a fascinating look at the businesses and people of the street at that time. 'Twenty eight of the ninety four' buildings featured were boarding houses (or lodging houses or chambers), which Kelly argues were 'a dominant feature of the street and...of the residential pattern of the city as a whole'. Like Davison, Kelly invokes the concept of the concentric city, and suggests that William Street's boarders were socially somewhere between the 'drifters' of Woolloomooloo and Darlinghurst, and the more well-to-do of the eastern suburbs. They represented 'that great army of employees and skilled mechanics...who could afford little more while waiting to "get a footing" in the economic life of the growing city'.[23] Also echoing Davison and the Chicago School model, Kelly suggests these boarding houses formed part of the means by which the city accommodated those who didn't yet fit the model of the nuclear family housed in their own houses in the suburbs.

In her study of boarding, Lydon uses urban archaeology to recreate the scale and ambience of a downmarket lodging house in Sydney's Rocks in the mid-nineteenth century. Mrs Lewis' boarding house in Gloucester Street catered to the lower end of Sydney's lodging house market and attracted transients, sailors and those associated with the wider maritime industry. Like Davidoff, Alford and Matthews, Lydon argues that keeping such a house was seen as an extension of women's traditional domestic role and allowed 'women to support themselves and their dependents without having to work in public'.[24] She also agrees with Matthews that these women formed non-business relationships with their tenants, often acting as 'surrogate parents'. Lydon attributes more prestige to boarding-house keepers than do most commentators, arguing that because boarding and

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[23] M. Kelly, *Faces of the Street* , p. 53.

[24] J. Lydon, 'Boarding Houses in the Rocks: Mrs Ann Lewis' Privy, 1865', *Public History Review*, 1995, p. 74; On lodging houses in the Rocks in the earliest period of Sydney's European settlement see G. Karskens, *The Rocks*, esp. Ch. 5, 'A Social Profile', and Ch. 16, 'Seamen and Landpeople'.

lodging houses were 'public businesses', 'their keepers were public figures who controlled sections of the urban environment', beyond the domestic sphere normally available to women.[25]

Boarding and lodging has also attracted some attention in other Anglo-Saxon countries. As we have seen, Lenore Davidoff has written on the British experience, and on the influence of the Chicago School in drawing attention to the role of boarding and lodging in accommodating new arrivals in the American city. Paul Boyer has briefly alluded to concerns about anti-social behaviour in predominantly-male boarding houses in American cities in the pre-Civil War period, while Joanne Meyerowitz has studied what she calls 'women adrift' – women living outside traditional family arrangements – in Chicago in the period from 1880 until 1930.[26] She argues that before about 1930 most of these women 'entered living situations that imitated the family, surrogate homes where they might live "like daughters"'.[27] These places could take the form of a real home, where the boarder simply joined an existing family, or perhaps be a boarding house, large or small, in which the landlady treated her guests something like a member of a family, including serving all meals in a communal dining room. Sometimes in Chicago these arrangements extended beyond a simple commercial relationship, and some 'women keepers might choose to provide some maternal care' to their guests.[28] Meyerowitz goes on to suggest that boarding began to decline from about 1915 onward as women sought more independent forms of living and landladies began to simply provide rooms to tenants who were expected to make their own meals using gas rings in their rooms.[29]

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[25] J. Lydon, 'Boarding Houses', p. 75.

[26] P. Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass), 1978, esp. Ch. 7, 'Young Men and the City: The Emergence of the YMCA'.

[27] J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880–1930*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988, p. 70.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid, p. 73.

Boarding and lodging was also a widespread, although decreasing practice in northeast American cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries according to John Modell and Tamara Hareven. Their study suggests that in Boston in this period,

> [w]hether a temporary measure or a longer-lasting arrangement, boarding was a function of the life cycle. It was most prevalent among unmarried men and women, most of whom were employed in the central downtown area.[30]

They also argue that contrary to the received image of boarding and lodging houses providing shelter to newly arrived foreign immigrants, as suggested by the Chicago School model, this type of accommodation was most popular among the native-born new to the city. Immigrants on the other hand appear to have preferred to buy their own homes and 'resorted to boarding as a temporary measure until they settled in their own households in other parts of the city or in other towns'.[31] Olivier Zunz found a similar tendency amongst the American and non-American born in Detroit in the same period of dislocation and rapid change.[32]

Taking in lodgers was popular with families for economic reasons, but increasingly began to be frowned upon by middle-class commentators and advocates of family values who saw it as upsetting the doctrine of the separate family in its own home. Supporters of these values argued that bringing strangers, especially sexually-mature young adults, into the sanctity of the domestic sphere exposed younger family members to moral temptation. Modell and Hareven suggest that a campaign against boarding and lodging by these people in part led to its decline, although they more specifically suggest the demise of this type of living arrangement was more attributable to other supply and demand factors. The coming of the welfare state removed the need for the 'supplementary family income' provided by boarders, while the growing availability of separate

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[30] J. Modell and T. Hareven, 'Urbanization and the Malleable Household: An Examination of Boarding and Lodging in American Families' in T. Hareven (ed), *Family and Kin in Urban Communities, 1700–1930*, New Viewpoints Press, New York and London , 1977, pp. 170–1.
[31] Ibid, p. 170.

accommodation for young single people who were increasingly demanding privacy, stagnated demand for board as the twentieth century progressed.[33]

Mark Peel suggests that boarding declined earlier than this in Boston. By the late nineteenth century lodging houses in which the young and transient were left to their own devices had become more common than the more traditional forms of boarding which had previously acted 'as a surrogate for the family, shielding transient individuals from the uprooting forces of migration.' He does agree, however, that lodging was viewed with suspicion by the middle-class who saw it as promoting 'a kind of antisocial behaviour inimical to family and community ties, alienating native and newcomer alike from the bulwarks of moral order'.[34] Paul Groth's major study of American residential hotels also looks at the role played by boarding and rooming houses in accommodating those outside the family model of society. Like Peel and Modell and Hareven, he argues that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the number of boarding houses declined rapidly in the major American cities, but that this is not reflective of a decline in demand for non-house accommodation. Boarding house keepers 'were not quitting but getting out of food provision – shifting their businesses from boardinghouses (sic) to rooming houses'.[35] They were doing so because it became more profitable for landladies to simple let rooms without meals, and thus 'eliminate[] the most troublesome and costly parts of [the] business'.[36]

The same occurred in Toronto, Canada, according to Richard Harris, who has ~~gued that 'as boarding declined' there in the twentieth century, 'rooming gr v'.[37] Toronto, which like Melbourne saw itself as a 'city of homes', witnessed conflict over its boarding and lodging houses in the late nineteenth and early

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O. Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality*, pp. 69–70.

[33] J. Modell and T. Hareven, 'Urbanization and the Malleable Household', pp. 180–1.

[34] M. Peel, 'On the Margins: Lodgers and Boarders in Boston, 1860–1900', *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 72, No. 4 , March 1986, p. 813.

[35] P. Groth, *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1994, p. 93.

[36] Ibid.

twentieth century. Harris suggests that the Toronto experience of this type of accommodation differed from described by Modell, Hareven, and Peel for the United States, and argues that lodging at least, didn't decline in Toronto until after the Second World War. Like the other commentators, he sees the more informal sector of the market as providing useful extra cash to householders, and suggests that taking in boarders allowed Toronto to become a 'city of homes' by providing extra income to home purchasers, who used the money earned from this source to ease the mortgage burden. Harris does agree that lodging was anathema to certain members of the middle-class, who saw it as an invasion of family privacy and a threat to morals, but suggests that for many other Torontonians people taking in lodgers was far preferable to the building of apartments which were more clearly associated with vice.[38]

Boarding and Lodging Houses in Melbourne, 1901–1947

The changes in the USA and Canada mirror many of those that occurred in Melbourne over the forty-or-so years from the turn of the century to the beginning of the Second World War. Here the number of boarding houses decreased, largely because operators found it cheaper and more acceptable to no longer provide meals, and began to simply let out rooms to tenants who catered for themselves. A result of this was that the status of the boarding house declined until in the eyes of many commentators and potential tenants there was no real difference between the two. Evidence for this, however is largely anecdotal as census figures collapse the categories of boarding and lodging into one category, which grew dramatically over this period. The 1901 *Census* found 2,364 boarding and lodging houses in Melbourne and its suburbs (See Table 1).[39] This represented 2.5% of all dwellings in the metropolitan area, but over 63% of all non-private dwellings.

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[37] R. Harris, 'The end justified the means', p. 337.

[38] Ibid, pp. 349–350; Also see his *Unplanned Suburbs*, esp. Ch. 5, 'The End Justified the Means'; On the association between vice and lodging in Toronto also see R. Dennis, 'Interpreting the apartment house', p. 308.

[39] *Census* 1901. No distinction was made in this tally between boarding houses and common lodging houses. Coffee Palaces, of which there were twenty-two housing 1,082 people, were counted separately.

These places provided accommodation for 18,255 people, just under four per cent of the metropolitan population. Most were quite small with the average number of inmates being 7.72. But, as with all averages, this figure hid some major size discrepancies as the smallest six places housed only one person each while the largest thirty-seven had more than twenty tenants each. Most places, however, housed between four and twelve people, which suggests they were former mansions and family houses converted for this use, rather than large institutional-style barracks or the delicensed hotels that were to increasingly be used as lodging houses in the twentieth century.

Ten years later at the *Census* of 1911 the Bureau of Statistics abandoned its former policy of counting boarding and lodging houses separately and instead lumped them together with coffee palaces and other multiple dwelling houses into one over-arching category.[40] Census collectors found 2,866 'Boarding, Lodging Houses and Coffee Palaces' in the metropolitan area, but ceased their former practice of recording the numbers of inmates at this and all subsequent counts. But we are able to deduce the number of people who lived in these types of dwellings, although it is difficult to be too precise. The census records that the average number of inmates per non-private dwelling (which includes this group as well as those resident in hospitals, charity institutions, gaols etc) was 11.72. If this figure is extrapolated out, about 33,589 people, or 5.2% of Melbourne's population, lived in boarding and lodging houses in 1911.[41] Based on the 1901 *Census* this figure seems rather large, and suggests that the numbers of inmates in non-private dwellings other than boarding and lodging houses may have inflated the figure somewhat. Max Kelly has done similar calculations for Sydney in 1911 (although it is difficult to see exactly how he gets his figures), and argues 'that about 43,800 persons were either boarders or lodgers in metropolitan Sydney in

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[40] The following figures until 1954 therefore are not strictly comparable with those of 1901. They also probably overstate the incidence of boarding in the later years as lodging and rooming increased while formal boarding declined, especially south of the city. See below.

[41] *Census* 1911. These figures may inflate the number of boarding house tenants by including the larger lodging houses and in some cases coffee palaces in the totals.

1911'. He puts this figure at about 7% of the population – considerably more if only the adult population is counted.[42]

Table 1: Boarding and Lodging Houses in Melbourne 1901–1947

Year	Number	Population*	%Dwellings	%Population*
1901	2364	18255	2.5	3.7
1911	2866#	33589	2.4	5.2
1921	5655#	62205	4.4	8.0
1933	6100#	na	na	na
1947	5564#	78452+	1.7	6.4+

Source: *Census* 1901–1947. *Based on extrapolations of average number of tenants across Victoria. #Includes Coffee Palaces. + Based on averages across Australia.

In 1921 5,655 Boarding, Lodging Houses and Coffee Palaces were counted. A breakdown of their locations was also provided for the first time and show that the City of Melbourne was the major site of these places with 1478. Other sizeable numbers were also to be found in St Kilda (573), South Melbourne (559), Prahran (536), and Fitzroy (529) (See Table 2). Based on Kelly's formula, approximately 62,000 people or 8% of Melbourne's population lived in these places. But as he himself has pointed out, these figures do not include those boarding with private families, so the actual numbers of boarders and lodgers in the city was probably considerably higher. Kelly also stresses that given the concentration of boarding and lodging houses in certain inner city locations, the percentage of residents boarding in many areas would have been much greater than the eight percent average.[43]

Table 2: Major Locations of Boarding and Lodging Houses and Coffee Palaces, 1921–1947

Municipality	1921	1933	1947
Fitzroy	529	551	496
Melbourne	1478	1927	1317
Prahran	536	554	632
Sth Melbourne	559	599	537
St Kilda	573	615	636

Source: *Census* 1921–1947.

Just over 6,100 places were counted in 1933 – a rise of approximately 500 over 1921. The City of Melbourne's total went up by 449 to 1927 while Prahran and St

[42] M. Kelly, *Faces of the Street*, p. 58.

[43] Ibid.

Kilda's numbers remained roughly static.[44] In 1947 the numbers declined by about the same number to 5,564. The major change again occurred in the City of Melbourne (down again to 1,317), suggesting that either the city centre was increasingly becoming a place of business, and that inner areas such as South Yarra and East Melbourne were moving from boarding to flat areas, or that a change in the definition of boarding and lodging houses, distorted the figures. In most other areas the numbers remained relatively stable, suggesting the latter is the more likely explanation. Footscray (154), Brunswick (172) and Prahran (632) also saw big increases, but nothing like the growth experienced in the City of Melbourne.[45] Based on the model of dividing the total population in non-private dwellings with the number of these establishments and then multiplying that figure by the number of dwellings, approximately 78,452 people lived in boarding and lodging houses in Melbourne in 1947 – about 6.4% of the population.[46] Again based on this model, almost two thirds of the city's boarding and lodging house population (51,000) lived in five inner city areas – Melbourne, St Kilda, Prahran, South Melbourne and Fitzroy, confirming both Kelly's thesis that the boarding and lodging population was overwhelmingly inner city-based, and suggesting that the 'zone of transition' model could be applied to inner Melbourne in the early postwar years.[47]

Just under 5,000 places were counted in 1954. Although this is outside the period of this study, it is instructive to examine these numbers in order to compare and contrast the apparently abnormally large figure for 1947. The 1954 figure show a drop in boarding house numbers of 500 or so in seven years. Prahran's numbers dropped by almost half, suggesting that its rapidly growing flat stock may have

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[44] These changes may also be indicative of the large increase in boarding houses evidenced by the large number of women who described themselves as employers or self-employed in this industry during the Depression (see below).

[45] The growth was related to definitional change. At the 1933 *Census,* for some reason, many lodging houses in the City of Melbourne were redefined as tenements. See Chapter Six

[46] Interestingly, the average number of inmates in non-private dwellings increased to 14.1 in 1947, up from 11.00 in 1921, probably reflecting the housing shortage.

[47] M. Kelly, *Faces of the Street.*

been built on the sites of former mansions that had been used as tenements.[48] The 1954 Census did not provide the statistics for the average number of inmates per non-private dwellings in Melbourne, but it did provide those for boarding houses across Australia. This was 10.93, suggesting that about 54,100 people (3.5 % of the population) lived in these places – a very large drop on the 1947 figure. This result suggests a number of things. The first is that using Kelly's model may produce too high an average number of inmates per boarding and lodging house. The second possibility and more likely explanation is that the abnormally high average for 1947 (14.1 as opposed to 11.7 in 1911 and 11.00 in 1921) may have reflected the unusually high level of overcrowding at that time, and the 1954 figure reflects the more natural long-term average.[49]

Sands and McDougall's yearly *Directory of Victoria* also provides evidence of boarding house locations. Each year Victorian businesses, including boarding and lodging house operators, were provided with the opportunity to place up to two free advertising entries in the business sections of the *Directory*, and thus is a useful guide to the locations and owners of boarding and lodging houses, including both the name of the proprietor and the detailed location of the premises. Thus, rather than merely supplying the municipal district provided by the census, *Directory* entries allow us to pinpoint exact locations. We can therefore ascertain that not only is an establishment in the City of Melbourne, but in East Melbourne, South Yarra or St Kilda Road, within the municipal boundary. From 1900 to 1944 boarding houses were variously advertised in the 'Trade and Professional Directory', 'Melbourne and Suburban Professional and Trade Directory', and the 'Melbourne Professional and Trades' sections, and after 1945, in the 'Melbourne and Suburban Classified Professions and Trades Section'. From 1900 until 1932 they were listed under 'Boarding and Lodging Houses', and

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[48] A 1966 report by the Housing Industry Research Committee (HIRC) suggested many of Melbourne's postwar flats were built on the sites of former large houses in the inner suburbs. See HIRC, *Flats... A Study of the Market in Flats – 1958–1965*, Housing Industry Association, Melbourne, 1966, p. 9.

[49] On overcrowding in the wake of the Depression and War see T. Dingle and S. O'Hanlon, 'Modernism versus Domesticity: The Contest to Shape Melbourne's Homes, 1945–1960', in J. Murphy and J. Smart (eds), *The Forgotten Fifties: Aspects of Australian Society and Culture in*

from 1939 until 1950 under 'Guest Houses'.[50] The advertisements were placed free of charge provided no block letters or telephone numbers were included – although these could be bought at extra cost. I have conducted a survey of these entries at roughly five yearly intervals from 1900 to 1941 in order to gauge the numbers of these establishments and to compare this figure with those found by census collectors.

One hundred and forty-five boarding and lodging houses were listed in the 1900 edition – less than ten per cent of those counted in the census the following year.[51] Most were in inner city areas, with forty in the city centre itself, and forty-five in Fitzroy and Fitzroy North. East Melbourne with sixteen was the only other area with more than ten. One establishment advertised itself in high tones:

> O'Callaghan, Mrs
> Superior accommodation for gentlemen, double and single rooms,
> 'Laurencteon', 353 Queen-st,

but most simply stated the name and address of the owner, suggesting the industry was reasonably unstructured and small in scale. In 1905 176 were listed, and again the vast majority were in the inner city, mostly in areas where large land boom and earlier period houses were moving from single family occupation to multiple occupation along the lines suggested by the 'succession' model argued by advocates of the Chicago School theorists. Thus Melbourne city itself had fifty-one boarding houses and Fitzroy, Melbourne's oldest suburb, thirty-five.[52] St Kilda's change from an enclave of the well-to-do to a more democratic pleasure resort and consequent flight of the rich was also becoming apparent with thirteen boarding houses listed there.[53]

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the 1950s, MUP, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 33–48.

[50] Guest houses were essentially the same as boarding houses rather than lodging houses.

[51] This discrepancy may reflect problems in Sands and McDougall's counting methods, but may also be caused by proprietor's advertising in the daily and weekly press rather than the yearly Directory. It may also be indicative of the informal nature of the industry before boarding houses were required to be registered after 1919.

[52] On Fitzroy see J. Davidson, 'Osborne House'.

[53] See A. Longmire, St Kilda; G. Davison and D. Dunstan, 'St Kilda' in G. Davison (ed), Melbourne On Foot: 15 Walks through Historic Melbourne, Rigby, Melbourne, 1980, pp 123–5.

Over the next twenty years the number of these places listed tended to fluctuate, as did their primary location. This may be a reflection of changes in the collecting methods of Sands and McDougall's as much as that in demand for accommodation. Boarding and lodging houses were listed until 1932, but from 1930 the only place listed was Gordon House in Little Bourke Street, which was more akin to an institutional common lodging house than a boarding house.[54] In 1929, at the beginning of the Depression, 117 places were listed across the metropolis, down from 182 in 1924. The Cities of Melbourne and St Kilda had the largest concentration with twenty eight and eleven respectively. The classification disappeared completely in 1933, but was revived in a different guise as 'Guest Houses' in 1939. This classification listed individual names of proprietors as before, but more often, simply stated the name of the house, perhaps confirming that guest house operations were now the primary function of boom-time mansions. The location of many of these guest houses in previously affluent areas undergoing decline, such as St Kilda Road, Queens Road, St Kilda, South Yarra, Toorak and East Melbourne, confirms this argument.

In 1939, the first year of the new classification, 550 guest houses were listed, including 138 in St Kilda and fifteen in the city proper. These figures represent less than ten per cent of the numbers counted at the 1933 *Census*, suggesting that either Sands and McDougall's grossly under-enumerated or that most of the places counted in the census were actually lodging houses rather than boarding or guest houses. The latter is more likely the case, reinforcing my argument that Melbourne mirrored the American and Canadian experience and boarding houses were replaced by apartment and rooming houses by the late-1930s. In 1941, during the wartime housing emergency 532 were listed, 477 of which were in inner areas. Over 300 were in the inner south eastern suburbs, which between them contained over 60% of Melbourne's guest houses, confirming both the

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[54] Gordon House was also the sole advertisement under 'Lodging Houses' in the Sands and McDougall *Directory* for 1910. On Gordon House see Chapter Six; Also see Alison Blake, 'Chinatown', in G. Davison (ed), *Melbourne on Foot*, p. 61; and Oakford Australia Pty Ltd., 'An Invitation, Gordon Place 110th Anniversary Open Day', Melbourne, 1994.

'zones of transition model' and Kelly's thesis about the tendency of boarding to be an inner city phenomenon in Australia.[55]

St Kilda Road's changing status from the home of the gentry to the abode of renters and transients was reflected in its twenty-four guest houses, most of which were former mansions, including Rath-gael, Glen Eira and Illoura. A similar situation existed in Queens Road which had thirteen guest houses, South Yarra which had thirty-eight, and Toorak, also with thirteen.[56] St Kilda had over 130 guest houses, almost a quarter of Melbourne's total number. Again, most of these were based in mansions such as Eildon and the Manor that had formerly been occupied by the gentry. The other major zones of guest houses were the inner east with sixty-eight (13%), and the inner north, which had a roughly similar number (sixty-four or 12%).[57] Only five guest houses, less than one per cent of the metropolitan total, were in the western suburbs, perhaps reflecting the lack of large houses there suitable for use as such accommodation – outside of parts of North and West Melbourne – as well as the traditional desire of Melburnians to live south and east of the city.[58]

Women as Boarding House Keepers.

A major feature of the boarding house market was the role played by women as boarding house keepers. This appears to have been an overwhelmingly female dominated occupation, perhaps reflective of the tendency noted above for it to be considered as an extension of women's traditional domestic tasks.[59] Along with

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[55] St Kilda Road and Queen's Road, Albert Park, Armadale, Brighton, Caulfield, Elsternwick, Elwood, Malvern and East Malvern, Port Melbourne, Prahran, St Kilda, South Melbourne, South Yarra and Toorak.

[56] See J. Buckrich, *Melbourne's Grand Boulevard.*

[57] The inner eastern zone included Abbotsford, East Melbourne, Hawthorn, Kew and Richmond, and the inner north Melbourne, Carlton and North Carlton, Collingwood, Fitzroy and North Fitzroy, Flemington and Parkville

[58] North and west includes Footscray, West Melbourne, Kensington and North Melbourne.

[59] For discussion of women as boarding houses proprietors see K. Alford, *Production or Reproduction?*; L. Davidoff, 'Separation'; J. Lydon, 'Boarding Houses'; J. Matthews, *Good and Mad Women.*

Katrina Alford and other feminist historians, Graeme Davison suggests that Melbourne's boarding houses were operated by widows and other women reliant on outside incomes. 'All but a few of the boarding-house keepers listed in the 1912 electoral roll covering the western end of the city', he writes, 'were apparently either widows, separated wives or the wives of labourers, seamen or other menial or casual employees'.[60] Sands and McDougalls' *Directories* confirm this female dominance well into the twentieth century. Their 1900 listing of boarding, lodging and guest houses show 107 of the 145 proprietors – almost three quarters – were women. In 1920 the figure was 119 of 181, in 1929 seventy-three out of 119, and as late as 1939, 130 of the 172 designated proprietors were women.[61]

Census figures confirm that boarding houses were a major employer of women in Victoria. The 1911 Census shows that just under 140,000 women were classified as being in the workforce. Their largest employment sectors were in the 'nurturing' fields such as teaching, health and domestic service, as well as in the textile and clothing industries, which together accounted for almost two thirds of women's employment. Work in a boarding or lodging house was another major employer and accounted for just over eight per cent of female employment – 11,606 women. Of those eleven thousand, almost a quarter were either employers or self-employed, perhaps confirming Alford's thesis that this industry allowed women not only economic freedom, but also some form of workplace autonomy.[62]

The opportunity for women to provide for themselves, and possibly their families by operating boarding and lodging houses is strongly illustrated by employment

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[60] G. Davison, 'Introduction', p. 12.

[61] The change from proprietor name to house name makes it difficult to calculate these figures in the latter period. In 1950, for instance only 104 of the 409 guest houses were designated by personal ownership rather than a house or business-name. Of these 104, seventy-eight were women. Calculated from Sands and McDougall's, *Directories*, 1900–1950.

[62] *Census*, 1911; K. Alford, *Production or Reproduction?*; Max Kelly puts the figure for women as employers or self-employed in Sydney's boarding houses in 1911 as closer to sixty per cent, *Faces of the Street*, p. 57. It is important to note that the following discussion only includes those women who declared their occupational status to Census collectors. As discussed above, a large number of women who took in boarders and lodgers did so informally, and these were not

experiences during the Depression. At the 1933 Census 6,662 women worked this field, a drop of just over 300 from 1921. What is unusual about this total, however, is that the number of employers or self-employed jumped from just on a quarter to over seventy per cent of those involved in the industry. What this suggests is that as employment opportunities dried up for both women and their menfolk, women increasingly turned to their domestic skills in order to earn an income.[63] The huge drop in the number of women classified as wage and salary earners in this industry at this time also possibly suggests two things. The first is that women were increasingly seeking work in other occupations and abandoning domestic employment, while the second is that proprietors of these places were also increasingly reliant on their own labour and that of their families in order to keep themselves above water. This latter suggestion is given credence by the jump in the number of unpaid assistants working in this industry. Their numbers more than doubled during the Depression, climbing from 141 in 1921 to 292 in 1933.[64]

The figures for total female employment in this industry declined by forty per cent in the thirty-six years from 1911 to 1947, from 11,606 to just over 7,000. As a proportion of female employment, however, the drop was much more pronounced. As more work became available for women in the retailing and manufacturing sectors they left domestic labour, including work in boarding houses. Women increasingly opted for what Beverley Kingston has referred to as the 'freedom of the factory', over the tyranny of domestic servitude with its long hours, low pay and supervision of one's personal as well as working life.[65] Those who remained did so as employers and self-employed rather than as employees. In 1947 the number classified in these categories stayed at their Depression levels of

counted by the census.

[63] Janet McCalman discusses the importance of female income earning ability in Richmond, Victoria in the face of the mass male unemployment brought about by the Depression. See *Struggletown*, Ch. 6, 'Young Marrieds', esp. pp. 193–6.

[64] *Census*, 1921, 1933.

[65] *Census* 1947; Employment in boarding and lodging houses accounted for only 3.25 per cent of female employment in 1947; See B. Kingston,, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary-Ann: Women and Work in Australia*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1980 (First published 1975), Ch. 4.

close to seventy-five per cent. Employment in the boarding and lodging industry had therefore collapsed, but keeping one of these places had become a major means by which a woman who had been widowed or left in straitened circumstances could support herself financially. But in the early postwar period she had reverted to running the operation by herself, without the declared support of unpaid assistants. The number of these declined to forty-eight in 1947, representing about one tenth of one per cent of employment in the industry. It should be noted, however, that many women, especially daughters, may have remained as assistants, while at the same time studying or undertaking employment outside the home.[66]

One of these widowed boarding house keepers was Mrs May Blay of Glassford Street, Armadale. In 1929 her husband – apparently a gambler by nature – died, leaving her at the age of forty-six to support herself and her two adolescent children as best she could. He also left her with a house under mortgage to pay off as best she could (Illustration 5). Mrs Blay 'hadn't been trained for anything else' but marriage, motherhood and 'other domestic tasks', including the provision of boarding and lodging to one or two young men. Her solution to her financial problems was to enlarge this operation, and so she 'filled the house with boarders', in effect moving from the informal to the formal sector of the market.[67] Mrs Blay's daughter, Betty Malone, describes her mother as lower-middle-class, and suggests that home-ownership was unusual in her circle but that taking in boarders was not. Betty's maternal family was heavily involved in providing board, usually to young men working in white-collar occupations in the local area. One aunt's husband was 'no good with money, so she had to keep boarders', while another 'kept boarders just for company'. She 'had three girls and when two of them married she said, "oh, we might as well have a boarder"'. Mrs Blay usually had 'about five', mostly male boarders in her house, but at one stage had eleven. Each was charged a minimum of twenty-five shillings per week for full board, which included breakfast, a cut lunch and an evening meal, as well as

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[66] Betty Malone, Interview, Thornbury, 8 September, 1997.
[67] Ibid.

mending and other household services. Her income from providing board therefore amounted to over six pounds per week with five boarders, and up to thirteen pounds with eleven.[68]

These amounts represented Mrs Blay's gross income before the costs of providing food and household comforts, and paying gas, electricity and other bills were taken into account. Even so, they represent a reasonably good wage for a woman in the 1930s. The Census of 1933 found that of the 254,109 female breadwinners in Victoria, less than four per cent earned more than £260 per year (£5 per week) gross. The vast majority (over 85%) earned less than £3 per week (£104 to £155 per annum).[69] Had Mrs Blay attempted to undertake office work her income would have been considerably lower, as weekly wages for commercial clerks averaged only a little under four pounds in the early 1930s.[70] None of this is to suggest that the boarding house keeper's life was an easy one. Office, retail and factory workers had fixed hours and tasks to perform. The boarding house keeper, on the other hand, was, like her cousin the domestic, expected to be on hand at all hours of the day and night, fifty-two weeks of the year.

Children were often conscripted in to help run the boarding house after hours and at weekends. This was especially a problem for daughters, who quite often found their leisure time was no longer their own, as they were expected to act as unpaid helpers around the house.[71] If the income derived from providing board and lodging is further divided up to include wages nominally owing to daughters, then the average wage begins to look much less attractive. The expectation that daughters would contribute their labour for free often caused resentment, and was a source of tension between mothers and their daughters, who found themselves working a double shift for very little remuneration. Betty Malone's experience confirms this. She worked full-time in a paper mill in her teens and early twenties,

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[68] Ibid.

[69] *Census* 1933 as reproduced in Victorian *Yearbook*, 1934–5, p. 267.

[70] *Victorian Yearbook*, 1930–1, 1932–3.

[71] See discussion of unpaid assistants above.

but was also expected to wait on, and clean-up after, her mother's boarders at night and at weekends. But her brother, who was a similar age wasn't expected to contribute in any way, a sore point with Betty to this day.

Boarders provided an income to women who might otherwise have been destitute, but as Jill Matthews and Jane Lydon suggest, they also provided company to women who might otherwise have lived alone. Betty Malone's mother saw her house as 'a home away from home' for her boarders, and 'enjoyed' having the extra company around the place. Her experiences also confirm the thesis that women who took in boarders sometimes acted in a quasi-maternal role to their tenants. Mrs Blay, says Betty, 'really liked having the boys around her and being mum' to them. They provided her with company, but also allowed her to be an authority figure, and an important person to more people than was perhaps normal for a widow in interwar Melbourne.[72] She attempted to make her boarding house as home-like as possible for her boarders who were treated almost as surrogate children. In the absence of close family and any other real home-base in Melbourne, several married from her house.

The apparent social isolation of some of these people is indicative of one of the sources of demand for boarding – young men from the country working in the city. Many of these young men came to the city to work in office and retail jobs that expanded after the turn of the century.[73] Mrs Blay's boarders were usually young trainee managers at Coles or bank or postal clerks on their own in the city. She provided them with support, a home and three meals a day, sometimes for years on end. Boarding provided these young men with a social network and a woman who acted as a mother figure to them. They in turn provided company for lonely women, but the decision to take in boarders was not always welcomed by other family members. The presence of boarders often caused anxiety for younger members of families who found their privacy and living space

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[72] Betty Malone, Interview. Betty was also interviewed by Sally Wilde in 1991 about similar issues. See S. Wilde, *The History of Prahran*, pp. 57–58.

[73] For a broader discussion of the 'drift to the city', that really got underway after World War One

encroached upon. Some female family members were especially put out by the presence of male boarders who didn't respect their rights to privacy or the family's existence outside their role as providers of board and lodging.

They also had to endure the often embarrassing trials of adolescence and emerging sexual maturity under the scrutiny of unrelated young men not many years older than themselves. It is likely that many would have been subject to unwanted sexual behaviour from their mothers' boarders. Betty Malone says she began to 'resent' the boarders who took up so much space around the house, leaving her with little privacy or time to herself. As she matured and began to court she felt 'unable to bring anyone home', fearing she'd become the butt of jokes from some of the boarders who took delight in humiliating her in public. These experiences have had a profound effect on Betty who to this day strongly values her privacy. Whenever she has 'nightmares', she says, 'I'm always looking after boarders and never have enough food'.[74] Her cousins weren't so put out by the presence of boarders in their house. They regularly courted various of their mother's boarders and two ended up marrying them.

Conclusion

Boarding and lodging was an important source of accommodation for many groups in prewar Melbourne and other cities, although the exact size of the market is almost impossible to deduce. Between five and eight per cent of Melbourne's population lived in this type of accommodation at most times in the years up to the Second World War, while another large, but numerically unknown, group lived as boarders or lodgers with private families. Boarding houses, if not their lodging house cousins, were considered reputable places to reside and were advertised as such without any suggestion that what was being provided was somehow disrespectable or untoward. Providing board or lodgings was also a largely hidden but nevertheless important source of income for women whose

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see Chapter Four.

[74] B. Malone, Interview.

employment opportunities were perhaps limited by their status and gender. It was also an acceptable and important source of income to widowed and other single women who would have perhaps otherwise found themselves destitute or reliant on family for support after the death of the family breadwinner.

This chapter has concentrated on a discussion of the size of Melbourne's boarding and lodging house market and on their locations and owners. It has conflated the boarding and lodging house market, largely because the available official sources do not allow anything else. The growth in the market for this type of accommodation over the forty or so years to 1940 was mostly confined to the bottom end of the market, and consisted largely of the conversion of former single family houses to rooming and lodging houses. The boarding house market, on the other hand, gradually declined in status as the century progressed. The next chapter will concentrate solely on the boarding house end of the market and involves a detailed discussion of the residents of these places and a study of life in them by focussing on the writings and reminiscences of former tenants of some of these places. It also looks at daily life in these places by focussing on the food and facilities made available to tenants, discussing daily life, and by studying the changes in various social and other mores associated with the different types of these establishments over the years, before the final chapter in this section discusses the apparent reasons for the decline in status of boarding houses in the interwar years.

Chapter Three

Boarding House Life

Introduction

Australian historians, unlike their American, British and Canadian colleagues are unable to rely on household census schedules for any data about the make-up of individual boarding houses as these are routinely destroyed for privacy reasons.[1] Here, in order to ascertain who lived in boarding houses and what they did there, we are mainly reliant on electoral records and a variety of mostly anecdotal sources and reminiscences.[2] But the evidence we do have suggests that at least in the early years of this century, boarding house tenants, perhaps in contrast with lodging house dwellers, were ordinary members of society, and did not fit the transient drifter model sometimes attached to them. Many were in fact quite well-to-do and socially prominent members of Melbourne's middle-to-upper-classes who used these houses because they were convenient. But few of the individuals who spent time as either boarding house tenants or keepers have left records of their time in these places. The best official source we have for tenants of boarding houses are electoral rolls which provide us with a breakdown of the gender and occupational make-up of these places over the years. They also provide us with rough counts of the number of residents of each house. A study of Victorian electoral rolls suggests that, at least in the earlier years of this study, many boarding house tenants were businessmen and women, or were independently wealthy. These people could have afforded to keep up a private house or flat had they so desired. That they chose to stay in boarding houses suggests that these

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[1] Studies of boarding and lodging in these countries are based on household census returns, and are able to not only find boarders and lodgers in registered houses, but also to trace lodgers in private houses by deducing that individuals with names different to that of the principal householder are probably lodgers. In Australia this is impossible and therefore, as discussed in the previous chapter, private lodging is largely an unknown and unquantifiable sector.

[2] See M. Kelly, *Faces of the Street*.

places offered a level of comfort, service and respectability not available elsewhere.

Non-official sources such as the reminiscences of writers and diarists, as well as a few snippets from surviving tenants of these places, are also available to the historian. In Melbourne writers from both the left and the right of the political spectrum have recalled their or their families' experiences in a variety of boarding houses in the prewar years. We also have access to oral studies, as well as interviews I have carried out with both the daughter of a boarding house keeper and a former St Kilda boarding house resident. These, and the quality and luxury of some of the facilities made available to tenants, suggest that the clientele were not the urban poor, and that the conflation of the boarding and lodging market, and the popular image of the boarding house as accommodation of the last resort, has been somewhat over-emphasised. What these sources confirm, however, is that individual boarding houses would cater for people of similar class background, and that it was unusual, at least in the earlier periods, for tenants of different classes to live in the same boarding house.

Electoral Rolls

Boarding house tenants appear to have stayed in one place for reasonably short periods of time. Their transience, however, is perhaps reflective of the status of some boarding houses in Melbourne's inner areas – especially St Kilda – as accommodation for holiday-makers as well as more permanent residents.[3] Reports from the social pages of newspapers and journals also suggest that boarding houses were used by the wealthy as short-term accommodation while they gave up their houses or flats before travel, or while searching for new and more

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[3] J. Buckrich, *Melbourne's Grand Boulevard*, p. 107; A. Longmire, *St Kilda*, pp. 2–3; Queen's Mansions in Beaconsfield Parade, St Kilda for instance advertised itself as a place for holiday makers and permanent guests, declaring itself to be 'St Kilda's Leading Private Hotel and Boarding Establishment' that catered for both 'permanent guests or visitors'. See *St Kilda By the Sea* – a short-lived publicity brochure put out by the council and local traders in the early-to-mid-teens – 1913 edition.

permanent accommodation.[4] Boarding house proprietors were reliant on two markets – the casual and the permanent – and had to advertise for both. The danger in doing so, of course, was that too heavy a reliance on one could alienate the other. Thus permanent guests were usually offered cheaper rates because they guaranteed an income, but could clog-up rooms that could be let in the holiday-season to higher-tariff guests for short terms.

Commonwealth and state electoral rolls allow us to trace the residents of boarding and lodging houses, provided they registered as voters. The rolls also allow us to find the approximate number of tenants in a particular boarding house, as well as the gender and occupational profiles of these places. What they don't do, however, is allow us to ascertain whether guests were casuals or permanents. It is reasonable to assume, however, that if a boarding house resident bothers to register as a voter then he or she is probably a permanent rather than a short-term tenant. Graeme Davison's study of Melbourne's late nineteenth and early twentieth century inner city boarding houses relied in part on electoral rolls to trace boarders and lodgers. He suggests that individual boarding houses had a class-basis, and were populated largely by middle-class or working-class people, but rarely by both. Davison's work concentrated on more working-class boarding houses and found that boarders and their landlords sometimes shared ethnicity or religion, and that members of particular trades and occupations were attracted to particular locations. Thus, he argues, 'those recorded as living in King Street and A'Beckett Street [West Melbourne] boarding houses in 1912 were labourers, grooms, railway employees, boot-blacks, bricklayers, storemen and other unskilled workers employed mainly around the port and warehousing districts'.[5]

I have undertaken a similar study of Melbourne's boarding houses using the electoral rolls from 1905 until 1944. These reveal the gender, marital and social status of some of the tenants of these places, and illustrate the decline in status of

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[4] See discussion of Delgetti, The Oaks and St Ives, below.

[5] G. Davison, 'Introduction', p.13.

boarding houses as the century progressed.[6] The boarding houses chosen are not based on any random or mathematical sampling method, but on advertisements in Sands and McDougall's, *Table Talk* and other journals, and one or two others that came to my attention from various other sources. The years 1905, 1912, 1917, 1924, 1931, 1938 and 1944 were chosen, largely based on changes to electoral boundaries and/or electoral counts. Electorates covered the inner south and east and included the suburbs of South Yarra, East Melbourne, St Kilda, and Toorak, although I have also looked at Queens Road and St Kilda Road. Most of the boarding houses were former family homes and so were not known as 'flats' in council rate books. [7]

Three boarding/guest houses in South Yarra – The Oaks, Delgetti and St Ives – operated throughout almost the entire period of my study (Illustrations 5 and 6). In the early period all three were frequently mentioned in *Table Talk* as the city address of socialites and visitors to Melbourne. In February 1911, for example, it was reported that 'Mrs and Miss Crossman have returned to Delgetti from Flinders', and also that 'Mr and Mrs WJ. Griffiths are now at Delgetti, where they have a suite of rooms'.[8] The Oaks similarly received a mention in 1910 when it was announced that 'Mr and Mrs Russell Lewis ha[d] taken rooms' there.[9] L. Oscar Slater's research into South Yarra West has found that both Delgetti (sometimes known as Dalgety) and The Oaks were built in Park Street for city 'grocer and jam-maker', Elias Cunliff in the early 1900s. In 1902 he built The Oaks as an investment property, and designed it to be 'a superior class boarding

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[6] Note the discussion in this section is focused solely on 'boarding' houses, and does not include 'lodging' houses.

[7] Rate Books do not list individual tenants in boarding houses as they do with tenants in individual flats. Even Cliveden Mansions, the former home of Sir William Clarke at the corner of Wellington Parade and Clarendon Street, East Melbourne, which was officially turned into flats in 1911, was listed as a single house in Melbourne City Council (MCC) Rate Books. The MCC Rate Books do not, therefore, give the names of individual tenants at Cliveden so I have used the electoral rolls to find these and included these as boarding house tenants in this section of my work. On Cliveden see T. Sawyer, 'Residential Flats in Melbourne'. Sawyer shows that Cliveden Mansions was in fact more like a boarding house than flats, because its suites did not have kitchens. Meals were prepared by servants and provided communally to tenants, pp. 27–8. Also see Chapter Six below.

[8] *Table Talk*, 16 February 1911.

[9] Ibid, 15 September 1910.

house, particularly for country visitors staying in Melbourne for special occasions'. He extended his property empire in 1906 by building Delgetti, originally known as Spillsby, but again aimed at the higher end of the boarding house market.[10] Both properties still exist as rooming houses in Park Street, although their status is somewhat diminished.

St Ives was originally in Domain Road, but moved to Toorak Road West in the latter years of World War One.[11] The second St Ives was a series of eight terrace houses opened up to form one continuous structure at the corner of Toorak Road and Walsh Street. It was demolished in 1959 to make way for flats.[12] Like Delgetti and The Oaks, St Ives was often mentioned in the social pages of *Table Talk* as the address of the rich and famous. A piece in January 1916 announced that:

> Lieutenant-Colonel and Mrs FB Heritage have taken a flat at St Ives Toorak-road. Lieutenant-Colonel Heritage has been appointed director of military training and is to arrive in Melbourne at the end of the month.[13]

The Heritages were still in residence in 1917 along with nineteen others, including five female O'Loghlens, three members of the Warnock family and nine other women, most of whom had no occupation outside the home.[14]

Former large family mansions in Toorak also served as boarding houses before going on to become institutions or being demolished to make way for flats or smaller houses later in the century. Toorak House, the former residence of the Victorian Governor, operated as a boarding house from 1912 until at least 1917,

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[10] L. Oscar Slater, *Walking Tour of South Yarra*, Prendergast Publishers, South Yarra, 1987, pp. 33–34.

[11] Note, however, the address of some tenants is still given as Domain Road in the electoral rolls until 1920. In 1905 and 1912 St Ives appears to be owned by Emily and Monckton Synott whose address is 13 Domain Road, South Yarra, according to the electoral rolls and Sands and McDougall's for that year. The same is true for 1917, although the *Table Talk* item below contradicts this. By 1920 the Synott's are listed in both records as living at 42 Toorak Road West. Similarly those listed as living at St Ives in the electoral rolls are said to live in Toorak Road.

[12] St Ives was demolished in 1959, *Sun* 17 December 1959, clipping found in National Trust File 1082, St Ives.

[13] *Table Talk*, 28 January 1916.

before eventually becoming the headquarters of the Swedish Church in 1956.[15] Mandeville Hall, the former home of softgoods trader Alfred Watson and later of Joseph Clarke, operated as 'an exclusive guest-house' from the early 1900s until 1924, when it was taken over by the Loreto Sisters to become a school.[16] Tenants at Mandeville Hall in 1912 included a ship owner by the name of Thomas Parker, a grazier John Lamb and three other female members of his family.[17]

Illawarra, the boom-time mansion in St Georges Road built in 1888-9 for land-boomer Charles James became an 'upper-class guest house' after his bankruptcy and disgrace in 1897.[18] So too did Myoora around the corner in Toorak Road, which was listed in the 1924 electoral roll as the address of High Court Justice Isaac Isaacs.[19] The Towers in Lansell Road was also turned from a private home into a guest house in 1916. A piece in *Table Talk* that year announced that it had been taken over by a Mrs Alexander of St Kilda Road who 'intends to spare no [expense] to raise the establishment' to a 'high standard of comfort and excellence'.[20] Coonac, the former home of pastoralist Robert Ronald, in Clendon Road also became a guest house in the twentieth century, being advertised in *Table Talk* in 1906 as 'Now Open for Paying Guests' (Illustration 8).[21] Coonac's tenants in 1917 included Robert Anderson and Marcell Conran who described themselves as inventors, Ernest Graham who was a metallurgist, and Walter Manifold, a Member of the Victorian Legislative Council. There were also twelve

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[14] Victorian Electoral Roll 1917. Electorate: Fawkner. Subdivision of South Yarra.

[15] D. Sanders (ed), *Historic Buildings of Victoria*, Jacaranda Press, Melbourne, 1966, p. 142.

[16] C. Kellaway 'Outline submission to the Classifications Committee HBC Hearing 29 July 1987. National Trust File No. 599, Mandeville Hall.

[17] Victorian Electoral Roll 1912. Electorate: Fawkner. Subdivision of Toorak.

[18] J. Paxton, *Toorak As I Knew It*, Prahran Historical Series No. 2, Prahran Historical Society, South Yarra, 1983, p. 19; E. Beever, 'James, Charles Henry (1848–1898)', *ADB*, Vol. 4, 1851–1890, D–J, MUP, Melbourne, 1972, pp. 467–8.

[19] Victorian Electoral Roll 1924. Electorate: Fawkner. Subdivision of Toorak.

[20] *Table Talk*, 8 June 1916.

[21] Ibid, 3 July 1906.

female residents, all but one of whom gave their occupation as 'home duties'. The exception was Nellie Stewart who was a nurse.[22]

Judith Buckrich suggests that St Kilda Road and Queens Road began to feature strongly as guest house locations in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Boarding establishments had, however, been operating there earlier than this.[23] Offington (formerly known as Ottawa), once the home of Edward Henty at 499 St Kilda Road, was a guest house from at least the early 1920s, and included amongst its tenants in 1924 Charles Alexander, an accountant and his wife Madge, Frederick Davies a mining engineer, and Frederick Holyoak, an investor.[24] By 1941 St Kilda Road's guest houses included Airlie, the childhood home of Stanley Melbourne Bruce at number 452,[25] Illoura at number 424 , and Armadale at number 461, which was run as the Four-Six-One guest house by Ada Sheehan until the 1950s.[26]

As we have seen St Kilda was a major location of boarding houses throughout the period of this study. Its boarding houses included among others, Emilton in Emilton Avenue, Summerland House in Fitzroy Street, Inverleith in Acland Street, Mandalay on the Esplanade, and The Manor, built in 1857 for Samuel Jackson one of the founders of St Kilda, in Jackson Street.[27] One of the largest in the early years was St Leonards, in St Leonards Ave which was owned and operated for decades by the Cummings family. Tenants at St Leonards in 1917 included William and Isabella Charsley who described themselves as being of independent means, Harold Harper, a solicitor, William Harper, a merchant, and

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[22] The one female exception was Nellie Stewart who was a nurse. Victorian Electoral Roll 1917. Electorate: Fawkner. Subdivision of Toorak.

[23] See J. Buckrich, *Melbourne's Grand Boulevard*.

[24] *Trust News*, Vol. 3, No. 14, October 1975; Victorian Electoral Roll 1924. Electorate: Fawkner. Subdivision of South Yarra.

[25] National Trust File No. 4606, 452 St Kilda Road; City of South Melbourne and Ministry for Planning and Environment *South Melbourne's Heritage*, p. 64.

[26] National Trust File No. 1533, Armadale 461 St Kilda Road; J. and P. Murphy Pty Ltd, 'St Kilda Road Mansions'.

[27] G. Davison and D. Dunstan, 'St Kilda' in G. Davison (ed), *Melbourne On Foot*, p. 130. The Manor was originally called 'Wattle House' by Jackson; See also National Trust File No. 1893,

Agnes Harper whose occupation was home duties. Also resident were two female members of the Cohen family and four female Shenes.[28] Few residents were listed in 1924, but in 1931 the clientele had become decidedly female. Of the twenty-one tenants, only four were males. They included a merchant, an agent, an engineer, and one man who had no occupation. The fourteen women were all engaged in home duties.[29]

Another major St Kilda venue was Queen's Mansions near the corner of Beaconsfield Parade and Fitzroy Street, which operated as a boarding house from the late nineteenth century until the late 1940s, when it more formally became flats (Illustration 9).[30] An advertisement in the *Age* in 1900 boasted that it offered '[l]arge well-furnished balcony and other [rooms]', billiards and a 'good table'.[31] The electoral rolls for 1905 suggest it catered for a predominantly female and comfortably well-off clientele. Twenty-three registered voters – four men and nineteen women – lived in Queen's Mansions in that year, including one married couple, Alexander and Maud Peatti, and perhaps one set of sisters, Agnes and Jean Malcolm. Three of the women and one of the men listed themselves as possessing 'independent means' while only another three of the women said they were employed outside the home. Two of these, a waitress and a housemaid, were perhaps staff of the establishment. The third, Ethel Cooper, was a teacher. The three employed males worked as a bank officer, an operator and as a clerk.[32] None of these twenty-three were still at Queens Mansions in 1912. By then the number of residents had expanded to fifty-seven – twenty-five men and thirty-two women. The tenant profile had changed to include many couples or family groups, including what appears to be four members of the Hall family – William of no

The Manor/Wattle House; Wattle House operates today as a Special Accommodation House for people with mental illnesses.

[28] Victorian Electoral Rolls 1917. Electorate: Balaclava. Subdivision of St Kilda West.

[29] Ibid, 1931.

[30] St Kilda Rate Books formally show it as flats in 1950 when it appears to have become the home of many Eastern European, especially Jewish, immigrants. Public Record Office Victoria, Victorian Public Record Series Number (hereafter PROV VPRS) 8816 P1 Unit 245.

[31] *Age*, 27 January 1900.

[32] Victorian Electoral Roll 1905. Electorate: Southern Melbourne. Subdivision of St Kilda West.

occupation, Alma a governess, and Claudine and Dulcie whose occupations were given as 'household duties'.[33] Throughout the 1920s Queens Mansions maintained this status as a place for couples and families, although few stayed for long periods, perhaps suggesting that it was the first home for people after marriage or for those newly arrived in the city.

East Melbourne's boarding houses included the Ritz, Belmont and Verona in Clarendon Street, and Chequers, Cairo, Tasma and Bella Vista in Parliament Place, near the Lutheran Church and St Patrick's Cathedral. These last four were part of Tasma Terrace, a terrace row begun in 1878 for George Nipper, a grain merchant and ship owner, that operated as a boarding house from 1911 until it became the home of the National Trust in 1979 (Illustration 10).[34] East Melbourne boarding houses were popular with journalists, perhaps because their proximity to the major newspaper offices at the eastern end of the city meant that a daily late-night commute to the suburbs was eliminated.[35] Others may have seen their residence in the inner city as evidence of their bohemianism and detachment from bourgeois norms. In 1924 journalists Helena and Henry Bett resided at Verona in Clarendon Street, while Margaret McLeod lived in The Ritz in the same street (Illustration 11). Another journalist, Lewis Woolcott lived in Belmont at 160 Clarendon Street, and Keith Murdoch lived at Cliveden Mansions in Wellington Parade in the same year.[36] The area was also said to be popular with local and visiting actors and musicians, again because of its proximity to the city and its theatres and other venues, although only one actress – Gwendoline Wilson of The Cairo – was registered as a voter.[37]

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[33] Ibid. Victorian Electoral Rolls 1917. Electorate: Balaclava. Subdivision of St Kilda West .

[34] National Trust of Australia (Victoria), *Tasma Terrace.*

[35] For example, the *Herald and Weekly Times* in Flinders Street, the *Age* in Collins Street, and perhaps the *Argus* in Elizabeth Street.

[36] Victorian Electoral Rolls 1924. Electorate: Melbourne. Subdivision of East Melbourne.

[37] Ibid.

Newspaper and Other Advertisements for Boarding Houses

Advertisements for boarding houses stressed comfort, convenience, price and respectability. One place in Gipps Street, East Melbourne advertised itself in 1920 as offering:

> Superior Board and Residence, moderate, use of piano, latch key, no children, homely, walking distance to city, close tram and train, furniture new'.[38]

Advertisements would also emphasise facilities available and the extent of grounds. Decomet in Alma Road, St Kilda East, for instance, advertised its 'beautiful grounds, tennis, courts', and garage.[39] Others, such as Mafeking House in Parliament Place, East Melbourne relied not only on facilities such as 'home comforts' and 'hot baths' to attract custom, but perhaps appealed to patriotic values as a last resort.[40] Some bo... .... ouses limited their potential market, but perhaps emphasised their resp............ y stressing that they were only available for gentlemen and married .... women, and certainly not for co-habiting couples.[41]

St Leonard's in St Leonard's Ave, St Kilda advertised itself in the early years of this century as an

> up-to-date establishment that stands pre-eminent for a number of reasons, every one of which is sufficiently important to make it worthy of the patronage of visitors to Melbourne.

These included its location, grounds, facilities such as 'hot water and electric light' and 'a tastefully furnished drawing room...for ladies'. A billiard room and a dining room overlooking 'the beautiful old garden' and 'capable of seating one

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[38] *Age*, 29 January 1920.

[39] *Age*, 30 January 1915.

[40] *Age*, 30 June 1900.

[41] *Age*, 26 June 1915.

hundred guests' were also provided for tenants. Tariffs ranged from 9/- per day for singles and 18/- for doubles.[42]

Other boarding houses would emphasise either their appointments or the extent of grounds available for relaxation. In 1914 a series of four adjoining boarding houses in Fitzroy Street – Voltaire, Racine, Aberdour and Scarborough – extolled the virtues of their amenities in *St Kilda By the Sea*. Potential tenants were tempted with 'hotel cuisine, tennis courts, motor garages, billiard rooms' and trains and trams at the front door. Tolarno, Mentor and Osborne, on the other side of Fitzroy Street offered similar facilities, but emphasised the healthier aspects of life in St Kilda. 'Tents fitted with Electric Light and all Conveniences for Summer and Winter' were said to be beneficial health and fitness.[43] Maritimo in Grey Street laid stress on its stateliness by claiming to be 'a beautiful Mansion House...with Gardens and Croquet Lawns', again beneficial to health and fitness. Reynella in Beaconsfield Parade, on the other hand, emphasised its newness and internal comforts such as 'Electric Light, Hot Water Service, Large Cool Rooms, Well Furnished Lounge and Drawing Rooms', as well as its meals which included a 'seven-course dinner with light wines'.[44]

A promotional piece for St Kilda's Ascog boarding house in *Table* Talk in 1911 suggested that its success had 'obliged' its proprietor to extend by taking the lease on Whin Bank, the house next door. The grounds of the two establishments were connected so 'the tennis court and billiard-room are available to residents of both'. Whin Bank's cuisine was said to be 'excellent', while its rooms had recently been 'most artistically furnished by a leading firm'. All of these advantages convinced the writer that Whin Bank was 'bound to be in great demand' and become like its neighbour, 'a leading residential establishment'.[45] Also in 1911 Corinella, just down the road in Tennyson Street, St Kilda offered

[42] 'St Leonards: C. Leonard's Avenue St Kilda Victoria'.

[43] *St Kilda By the Sea*, 1914.

[44] Ibid, 1915-16.

[45] *Table Talk*, 8 June 1911.

itself in the *Argus* as a 'COMFORTABLE refined mansion HOME for gentlefolk, electric light, hot water throughout; 3 acres beautiful grounds; tents, tennis, croquet, stables, 1 minute Brighton-rd car'.[46]

Proprietors would stress the exclusive nature of their clientele in a number of ways. Exclusivity could relate to social status, but also to other issues including religion. A 1925 advertisement for Greycourt in Royal Parade, Parkville highlighted its comfort, class and convenience, suggesting its target market were city business folk:

> Business Men and Women have the right to expect something different to the ordinary Boarding House. You'll find it at Greycourt where every comfort and convenience is provided at a most reasonable tariff.
>
> Thoroughly renovated and modernised, the fine home stands in well-kept grounds, with spacious Government reserves back and front.
>
> Individual Suites, Sitting-room with Sleepout opening off, provide unique accommodation. Private telephone in every Suite. Comfortable, well-appointed lounge and reception rooms when you are in the mood for company; the privacy of your own Suite when you desire it.[47]

A year later, Mrs R. Koodak of St Kilda stressed the other type of exclusivity by simply notifying readers that her St Kilda 'Jewish boarding house has few vacancies, close every conv (sic), close tram and beach, reasonable'.[48] Most editions of the newspapers would also carry advertisements notifying Catholics or Protestants of room and board available to tenants who shared their religious beliefs.

Boarding House Life

Direct knowledge of life in these boarding houses is now fairly rare, although one or two survivors have been able to pass on their stories to me. Our best source of

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[46] *Argus*, 24 June 1911.
[47] *Argus*, 27 February 1925.

Illustration 5: Mrs Blay's Boarding House, Glassford Street, Armadale.
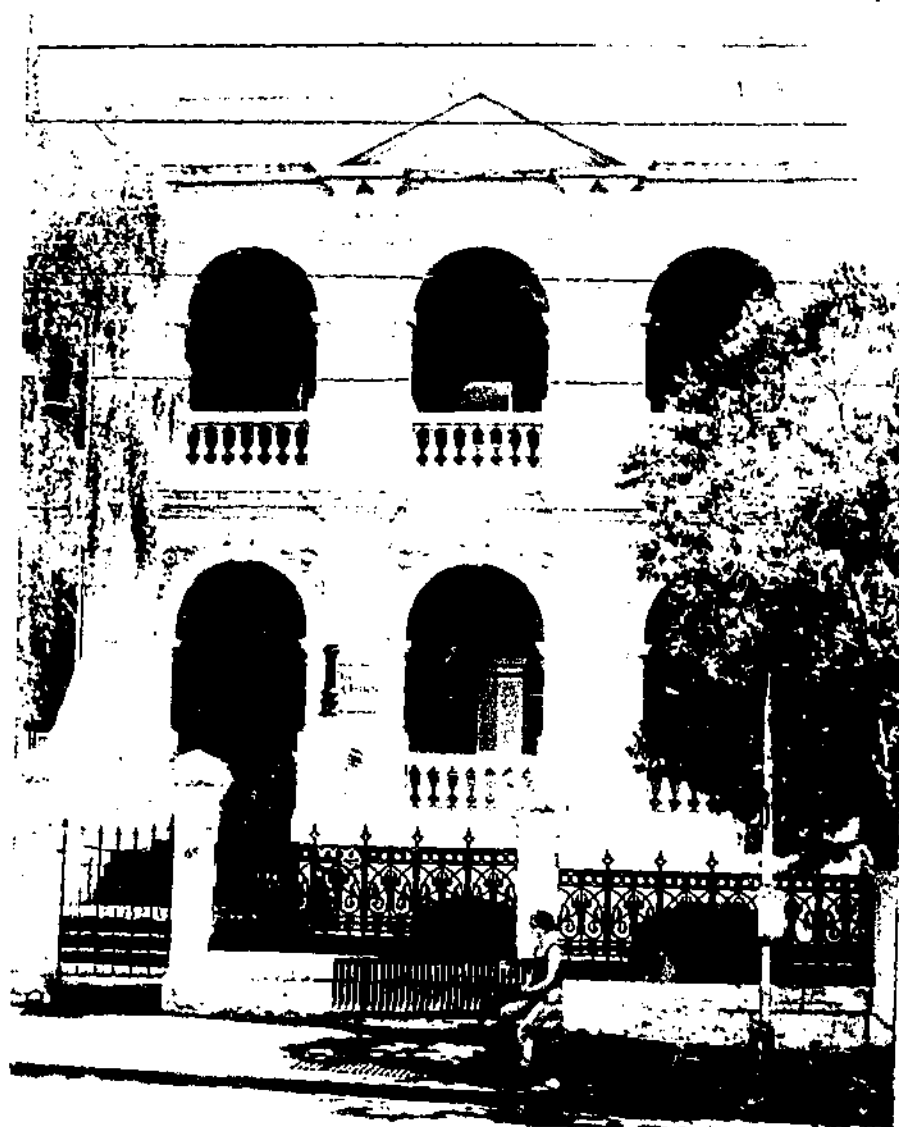
Illustration 6: The Oaks Boarding House, Park Street, South Yarra.

Illustration 7: Dalgety (Delgetti) Boarding House, Park Street, South Yarra.
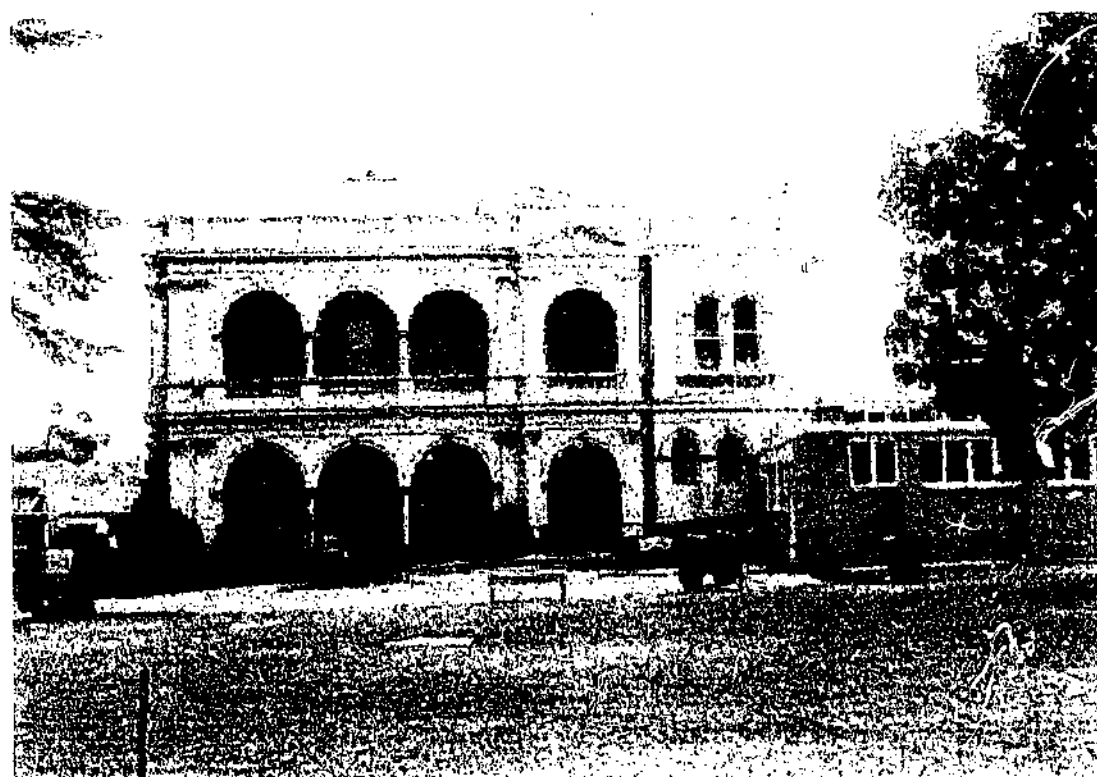
Illustration 8: Coonac, Clendon Road, Toorak.
Source: Pictoria.
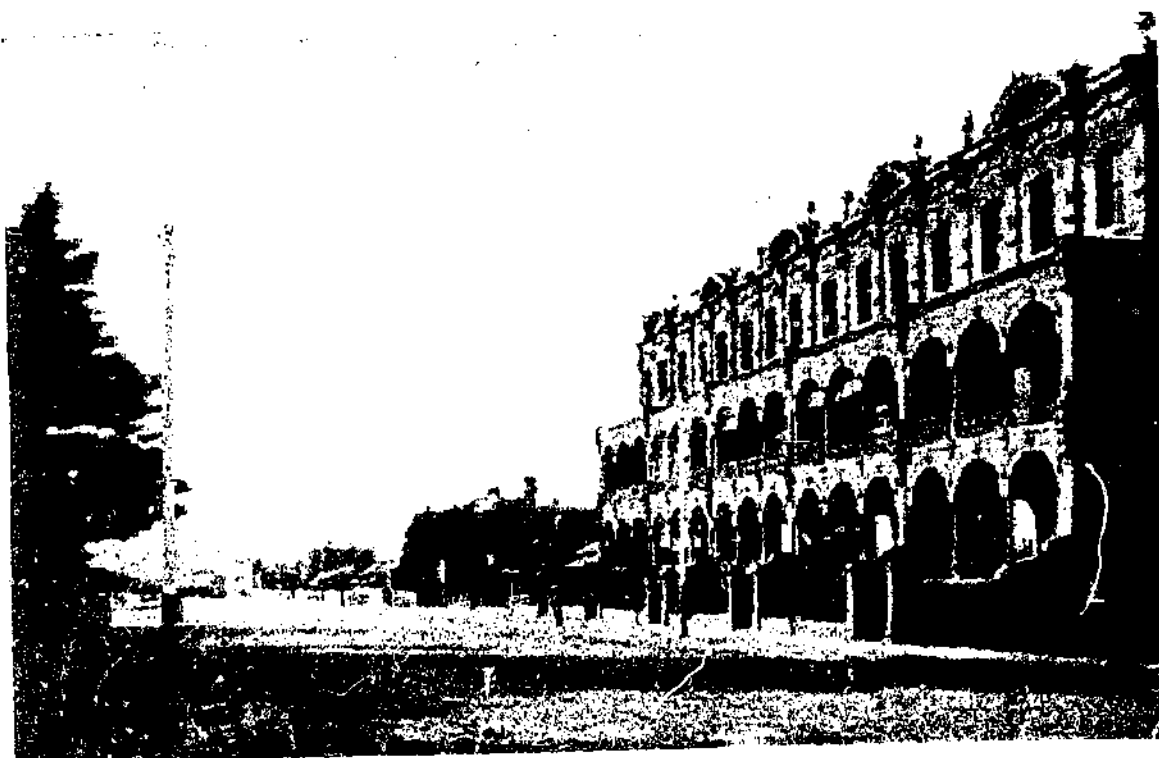
Illustration 9: Queen's Mansions, Beaconsfield Parade, St Kilda.
Source: Pictoria.

Illustration 10: Tasma Terrace, Parliament Place, East Melbourne.
Source: Pictoria.

Illustration 11: The Ritz, Clarendon Street, East Melbourne.
Source: Pictoria.

Illustration 12: Illawarra, St Georges Road, Toorak.
Source: J. Paxton, *Toorak As I Knew It.*

information on these places is therefore the reminiscences of former tenants who have written about their experiences either for their own interests or for the general public. The use of autobiographical sources is an important tool for the historian, but it is important that we recognise that the stories told in these reminiscences may be more reflective of the author's views in later life than those he or she held at the time they write about. Thus it is necessary to understand that an author's perception of their life in boarding houses may have become influenced by their later embrace of political or social viewpoints that may reflect badly on certain modes of living.[49]

Similar problems exist with the use of oral testimonies, many of which are more reflective of the interviewee's current opinions and perceptions than any he or she may have held in their youth.[50] A good example of this is a series of interviews undertaken in the early 1980s by a group of unemployed youth in St Kilda. They were commissioned to record an oral history of the area by interviewing some of the older residents living in nursing homes in the district. Transcripts of these interviews, which are held at the State Library of Victoria, provide an insight into some of the different aspects of life in St Kilda in the first half of this century, including life in boarding and guest houses.[51] In this case, however, special precaution needs to be taken by the historian when using these sources. There are several reasons for this: The first is that these interviewers were not trained

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[48] *Argus*, 26 June 1926.

[49] The Popular Memory Group discuss some of the problems of relying on the accuracy of autobiographical accounts in their article 'Popular memory: theory, politics, method', in Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan, Bill Schwarz and David Sutton (eds), *Making Histories: Studies in history-writing and politics*, Hutchison in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, London, 1982, especially pp. 231–240; Similarly Paula Hamilton also warns of these dangers in her '"Inventing the Self": Oral History as Autobiography', *Hecate*, Vol. 16, Nos. 1/2, 1990, pp. 128–133.

[50] Recent debates on the uses and abuses of oral history as a legitimate historical source include among others, P. Hamilton, 'The Knife Edge: Debates about Memory and History', in K. Darian-Smith and P. Hamilton (eds), *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia*, OUP, Melbourne, 1994, pp. 9–32; Popular Memory Group, 'Popular Memory'; Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*, OUP, Melbourne, 1994 (First published 1994), Appendix 1, 'Oral History and Popular Memory'; A. Thomson, M. Frisch, P. Hamilton, 'The Memory and History Debates: Some International Perspectives', *Oral History*, Autumn 1994, 25th Anniversary Issue, pp. 33–43.

historians and undertook the project as part of a community-based study rather than an academic or professional history exercise. In many ways the transcripts reflect a desire on the part of the interviewers to find a once-existent 'community' that appeared to have been lost by the time the interviews were conducted.[52]

The second major concern is that, as with many oral history projects, the interviewees were in part self-selective. Most were 'found' by the interviewers from among the elderly residents living in institutional accommodation in the area. Their life-long attachment to St Kilda perhaps suggests they were unusually committed to it and its history. They may also have been unusually attuned to their surroundings, and able to recall stories not remembered by others. Janet McCalman admits that in her study of Richmond some of her subjects were 'gifted observers of their life and times', while others weren't so able to excite their listeners. The former, almost by definition, become the quoted and quotable. She also suggests when recalling their youth older people tend to highlight aspects of life that most closely resemble the type of life they feel they have led, or wish they had led.[53] They are not lying or exaggerating, but simply recalling a halcyon version of their past. In the St Kilda study we do not know how many potential interviewees were ignored because their stories were considered uninteresting or unworthy of notice. Nor do we know how much of the memory recovered here is 'group' memory of long-time St Kilda residents who are

[51] St Kilda Oral History Project: Transcripts of Tapes made of St Kilda Residents, SLV MS 2510/3.

[52] For a discussion on the concept of 'community' and its perceived decline in Australia, see G. Davison, T. Dingle and S. O'Hanlon, (eds), *The Cream Brick Frontier*, Ch. 12, 'Local Perspectives: A Round Table Discussion'; Also see M. Peel, 'Between the houses: neighbouring and privacy', Unpublished MS, Melbourne, 1998; Sally Alexander has found similar traits in her research on London in the 1920s and 1930s. Her interviewees had a 'ubiquitous memory of community as a child: ("No-one ever locked their door"; "Everyone was in and out of each other's houses")', S. Alexander, 'Becoming a woman in London in the 1920s and 1930s', in D. Feldman and G. Stedman Jones (eds), *Metropolis London: Histories and representations since 1800*, Routledge, London, 1989, p. 255; Paula Hamilton looks at the issue of the danger of interviews becoming sites 'of struggle or negotiation between the story the interviewer wants to hear and that which the participant wants to tell' in her 'Knife Edge', p. 15.

[53] J. McCalman, *Struggletown*, pp. 2 and 182-191.

perhaps remembering popular histories of the area rather than their own 'real' memories.[54]

The third cautionary note on these interviews is to do with the structure of the remaining evidence. The State Library of Victoria only holds hand-written transcripts of these interviews and, as with all transcripts, they don't fully convey the nuances of conversation, and only partly reflect the prompting and leads that interviewers engage in as a matter of course. As the Popular Memory Group point out, written transcripts of interviews cannot accurately describe 'the *way* in which the story was told' (original emphasis), and sometimes leave us with a distorted or 'cold' version of the original story.[55] But even with all these provisos, these interviews are a useful historical source because they bring to life aspects of life in parts of St Kilda which then, as now, was one of Melbourne's liveliest and most diverse suburbs

A good example of the problem with written reminiscences is perhaps Henry Lawson, who in the early twentieth century recalled his stay in a West Melbourne boarding house in the mid-1880s as being a rather unpleasant experience. Mrs Kelly's boarding house had been recommended to him by a friend from Sydney, but it wasn't to his taste. Twenty years later he described his landlady as a 'seamed and smoked little old Judy doll' whose house 'was in a shabby street of two-storeyed "terraces"'. According to Lawson, however, Mrs Kelly was not one to be bowed by the reality of her situation and attempted to keep her boarding house 'genteel' no matter what the nature of its surroundings.[56] Whether Mrs Kelly's boarding house resembled anything like this we will perhaps never know.

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[54] The Popular Memory Group quote Stephen Koss's review of Paul Thompson's *The Edwardians* in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 5 December 1975, to alert us to the danger that some of the memories recovered in oral testimony as the interviewees' own experiences, may well be 'popular memory' – anecdotes handed down through families or groups – or knowledge gained from sources such as books or television. See 'Popular Memory', p. 223.

[55] See Ibid, p. 233, for a discussion of the differences between an oral testimony and its written format.

[56] H. Lawson, 'A Fragment of Autobiography', in Colin Roderick (ed), *Henry Lawson: Autobiographical and Other Writings 1887–1922, Volume Two of Collected Prose*, Memorial

But we should be aware, as Graeme Davison has suggested, that much of Lawson's writing, like that of many of his contemporaries, reflects his disgust at life in the cities as he experienced it, rather than any dispassionate account of life as it was lived by others during the period he describes.[57] Nevertheless autobiography can give us a knowledge of how life was felt to be experienced by authors. We as readers, however, need to read them with a certain scepticism and be alert to potential revisionism and self-serving statements or justifications.

The same is possibly true of the recollections of boarding house life by would-be author, but temporary clerk, Alan Marshall who was a tenant in an East Melbourne boarding house in the 1920s. He rented a sleepout bungalow in the backyard of the house for 17/6 per week, an amount that included all meals, 'but no washing', which he took home to the country to be done by his mother at weekends.[58] The boarding house was run by Mrs Birdsworth who 'was an elderly woman who had married a slothful man', and now took in boarders in order to support the two of them as they grew old.[59] Mrs Birdsworth was as an 'excellent cook' whose 'sentimental nature fought a constant battle with the keen business sense of a boarding house proprietress'. Marshall described his boarding house as 'middle-class', and 'patronised by men and women guarded by a feeling of superiority from the troubles of the people on the streets'. They were a revelation to him as a lad newly arrived in the city from the country, unused to the reserved ways of the city middle-class. He later wrote that at that time he found their 'rules of behaviour' difficult to comprehend and a touch on the cold side.

Hal Porter has also written about his experiences in board and lodging houses in Melbourne in the 1930s and 1940s in less than positive terms. After boarding with

Edition, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1972, pp. 200–204; See also G. Davison, 'Introduction', p. 13.

[57] See G. Davison, 'Sydney and the Bush', esp. pp. 197–8; Note that Lawson's mother had run a boarding house in Sydney after the break-up of her marriage. As Davison notes she wrote about this in 'A Xmas Story', published in the *Dawn* in 1889, and also as the background for her short story *Dert and Do*, published in 1889.

[58] A. Marshall, *This is the Grass*, Longman Cheshire, 1988 (First published 1962), Part Two, Chapter Four, p. 89.

family and privately in Williamstown, his first adult experience of boarding involved renting a room in a old house at the top of Collins Street in the city in 1937. For fifteen shillings a week he received room and board at the back of a three-storey former family townhouse. Here no communal meals were taken and Porter claims to have lived a fairly solitary existence getting to know only the landlady, Miss Beveridge, the maid May, and one or two of his fellow tenants.[60] Later he moved to an equally unfriendly, but cheaper room in a 'general store and rooming-house' in McKenzie Street near the police headquarters, which was run by 'three old spinsters', the Misses Gregory, who he despised for their meanness and small-mindedness.[61] In the postwar period he also managed and lived at the George Hotel in St Kilda, where he described the permanent guests in similarly unflattering terms.

Another regular tenant of Melbourne's less-salubrious prewar boarding houses was Sam Goldbloom, who returned to Melbourne from New Zealand in 1934 when he was fourteen years old. He was alone without family – his father having died and his mother electing to stay in New Zealand with his brother. Sam got work in the fur fashion industry and board and lodging in a family home in South Melbourne for 12/6 per week, which included three meals a day. He went on to board in various types of places from 1934 to 1941 when he joined the air force. His experience was that 'boarding houses operated at a series of levels', from families, or individual women who took in lodgers, to proper boarding houses that had once 'been houses of the rich – multi-storey, two-storeyed, many rooms'. Most of those in which Sam stayed tended towards the lower end of the market, although he suggests they may once have been more elegant and well-to-do as they had a 'rather tatty air of gentility about them by the time I was going through the front door'.[62]

[59] Ibid, pp. 105–6.

[60] H. Porter, *The Paper Chase*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1966, pp. 70–73.

[61] Ibid, p. 103.

[62] Sam Goldbloom. Interview, Elsternwick, 2 June 1997.

Sam mostly stayed south of the Yarra in boarding houses located along Beaconsfield Parade in South Melbourne and St Kilda. They were large houses with a 'dining room' and 'some sort of a lounge and a few bedrooms' downstairs, while upstairs was 'all bedrooms and bathrooms', usually two, 'maximum three if you were doing well'. Amenities were usually satisfactory, although the level of comfort was closely related to price. Sam says that when inspecting a boarding house, one would always 'plop down on the bed to test out the mattress and the springs, and you would automatically go and have a look at the bathroom, toilets, and some of them were just too bad to be imaginable'. Most places, though, were reasonably comfortable, but with 'a fairly worn, tatty look about them. The carpets were frayed at the edges and sheets were sometimes sewn together because they had been torn and that sort of thing'.[63]

Most of the places he stayed in were 'pretty much of a likeness' with essentially the same characters and characteristics. This was especially the case when it came to food. In most, 'Sunday lunch was roast lamb, Sunday in the evening was cold roast lamb. Monday was rissoles – more of the cold lamb, and Tuesday was something like some meat with....curry, curried lamb. So you had lamb in one form or another', for most meals in the first part of the week. Food was fairly strictly rationed with treats such as scones doled out in numbers that precisely matched the number of diners at the table. There were no seconds. Food was 'very English' with lots of 'white sauces' and 'yellow custards'. Cuisine and personal differences with landladies were usually the cause of Sam's frequent moves, but unemployed and related poverty also forced departure on several occasions. The one major difference to this sameness of boarding houses for Sam was a place in 'Charnwood Crescent or Charnwood Grove', St Kilda run by a Mrs Crystal. The residents there were 'largely Jewish', as was Mrs Crystal herself. 'To a significant degree they were German and Austrian refugees', and this made the boarding house different from the ordinary. 'There was a certain communality in that we were all Jewish', recalls Sam, and he also remembers being aware that most of the other residents had had some very bad experiences in Europe.

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[63] Ibid.

English journalist Evelyn Clowes and others have written about boarding houses further up the social scale. During a prolonged visit to Melbourne early this century Clowes discovered the difficulties of finding suitable accommodation for a genteel lady like herself when she trudged the streets looking for lodgings. She described Melbourne as lacking "those lodgings with one or two bedrooms, a sitting-room, and privately served meals – probably presided over by an ubiquitous ex-butler and cook – which we regard as a matter of course in England'. Instead she found herself confronted at every door 'by the same mingled whiff of cabbage and linoleum, and the same complete indifference as to whether I took the rooms or left them'. Clowes was also perplexed by the lack of service in these places and the managements' complete 'horror' at the suggestion that she might take her meals privately. She did concede, however, that these sorts of places were being superseded by 'comfortable, well-ordered, truly home-like boarding-houses' being established in several affluent districts by 'a few capable gentlewomen' in distressed circumstances.[64]

She was right. Out in the wealthier suburbs of Melbourne at this time distressed and not-so-distressed gentlemen and women were giving up their large mansions and moving into these boarding houses to take advantage of the equipment and services they offered. James Paxton's father was a banker and his extended family well-established members of the Toorak social set. James was born at the family home 'Calga' in Clendon Road in 1900, before the family moved to a rented Queen Anne villa in Kooyong Road near Albany Road.[65] In 1909 his family 'tired of renting a house' and decided to build for themselves, but in the meantime 'went to live in St. Georges Road at Illawarra Guest House'. Paxton has described Illawarra as having 'twenty-five main rooms plus a ballroom' as well as two and a half acres of 'magnificent garden and a tennis-court' (Illustration 12). This was certainly no 'common lodging house' and came with all the services Clowes claimed were lacking in Melbourne. The five resident families were known as

[64] E. Clowes, *On the Wallaby in Victoria*, Heinemann, London, 1911, pp. 29–32.

[65] This and subsequent information is from James Paxton's, *Toorak As I Knew It*, pp. 19–21.

'guests' and each 'had their own suite and some had their own private sitting room'. Guests were looked after by 'about nine' staff including a butler, housemaids, gardeners and a general handyman, named Tom.

Boarding and guest houses also served as residences for families and women who had neither the ability nor desire to cater for themselves. One such family were the Pitts, whose daughter Kathleen Fitzpatrick has written that her mother tired of running a house in the late teens and opted to board rather than keep house herself. Her mother, she writes, 'simply could not stand housekeeping any longer' and decided that the family house

> was to be sold and our furniture was to be stored and we were not going to have a house at all, but to live in a boarding-house called 'Cloyne', a fine old house with a garden, in Alma Road near Chapel Street.[66]

Cloyne proved unsuitable, as Kathleen and her sister who were both studying, were forced to share a room. The family therefore moved to the Ritz Guest House in Clarendon Street, East Melbourne, which Fitzpatrick described in similar terms to Paxton's Illawarra. It was, she says, 'one of the well-built old mansions of East Melbourne' and 'was a superior guest-house because it included some flats for families'.[67]

In 1934, the librarian at Presbyterian Ladies College, Fairlie Taylor and her daughter became tenants at Chequers in Parliament Place, East Melbourne, which had been recommended to them by a grazier acquaintance who stayed there when on business in Melbourne from Castlemaine.[68] Chequers was run by a Mr Pearson and consisted of 'three interconnecting houses, with a common dining room in the basement, and a large lounge on the ground floor'.[69] Taylor and her daughter rented a room for weekdays only, going home to her mother's place on weekends,

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[66] K. Fitzpatrick *Solid Bluestone Foundations: Memories of an Australian girlhood*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1987 (First published 1983), Part 3, 'In the Parental Tent', p. 121.

[67] Ibid, p. 122.

[68] F. Taylor, *Time Recalled*, Alpha Books, Sydney, 1978, Chapter 7.

[69] Ibid, p. 97.

thus freeing up the room for higher-paying casual guests.[70] Room and board for the two of them cost two pounds, although an open fire cost an extra shilling per night in winter. The room they 'shared was large, clean and comfortable. There was a big marble fireplace, with a crack in the centre of it, over which [they] pasted a picture of Aida'. There were up to sixty-eight 'paying guests' at Chequers at any one time and these included some quite wealthy people such as Mr and Mrs Miller who were 'connected in some way with the sugar industry', a Mr Lyall from the Education Department, a mine manager, and 'a young lawyer trying, at that stage unsuccessfully, to get into parliament. His name was Harold Holt.'[71]

Other similar genteel boarding houses survived into the 1930s. One in East Melbourne was called Bella Vista, and was operated by the sisters Miss Mary Ware and Mrs Alice de Witt. Their niece Grace Ware described family tales about the house in a letter to the National Trust of Victoria in 1981.[72] Grace Ware's 'late sister' helped out at Bella Vista when she was young and described the drawing and dining rooms to her sister as being 'furnished with elegant antiques'. Sam Goldbloom recalls 'a better class of boarding house on St Kilda Road', staffed by servants and populated by 'dowager-type ladies with pink-rinse hair who would sit around in a very sort of imperious atmosphere as though they owned the place'. Most of the guests in these places were women, especially widows, including at one stage, Sam's mother who moved into one called Nanguniah after she returned to Melbourne in the late 1930s.[73]

Helen Jacobi has recalled St Kilda's affluent boarding houses of the 1920s and 1930s. Her grandparents lived at the Thallassa boarding house on the corner of

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[70] See above for a discussion of the tensions for proprietors of providing casual or permanent accommodation. In Taylor's case she and her daughter were eventually forced to vacate their room and move to a smaller one upstairs. The larger room was needed for guests paying higher tariffs. Ibid, p. 102.

[71] Ibid, p. 98.

[72] Letter from Miss Grace Ware to National Trust of Australia (Victoria), 25 October 1981. National Trust File No. 1937, Tasma Terrace.

[73] Sam Goldbloom, Interview.

Fitzroy Street and Beaconsfield Parade after retiring from ownership of the Esplanade Hotel.[74] Helen was a member of an extended Jewish family named Swieca and was acquainted with members of many of St Kilda's other Jewish families. She appears to have had an almost encyclopedic knowledge of central St Kilda, and was able to list the local landmarks along Fitzroy and Acland Streets. Helen remembered St Kilda as being 'full of guest houses. I mean it was a way of life, if people didn't live in their own private houses'. These places were 'elegance plus'. Living there was 'easy because I mean it was quite reasonable, but it was very exclusive, and all meals, and good table. People who didn't want the bother, perhaps of running a home'. In Acland Street there was 'a beautiful guest house called Inverleith', in which a bachelor friend of Helen's parents, Alex Isaacson lived. Alex's room was very elegant and reflective of his extensive travels and collecting. The room was full of antique clocks 'from all over the world. And each clock was set at the time of the country that it came from'. He also had a large collection of silver and candelabra 'and things of that sort. He was a real connoisseur.'

Alex Isaacson is perhaps indicative of the role played by boarding houses in providing accommodation to the bohemian and the unconventional. Although Helen Jacobi does not openly say so, her reference to his 'bachelor' status and his love of antiques and *objets d'art* was probably an allusion to his homosexuality. The frequency with which writers and other witnesses to the boarding house world refer to 'theatrical' and 'artistic' people is more than likely a euphemistic means of pointing out that some boarding houses were home to homosexual men and lesbians. Hal Porter's biographer, Mary Lord suggests that he saw the time he spent boarding and lodging in central Melbourne as part of his education in the ways of bohemia. The relative anonymity of these places also allowed him to indulge his sexual preferences without attracting too much unwanted attention.[75] Gary Wotherspoon has suggested that Sydney's inner city boarding houses were

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[74] St Kilda Oral History Project, Helen Jacobi (nee Swieca).
[75] M. Lord, *Hal Porter: Man of Many Parts*, Random House, Sydney, 1993, esp. Ch. 4, 'The Young Bohemian'.

frequently inhabited by homosexual men who felt able to be reasonably open about their sexuality in the relatively freer social climate of these areas. The role of the landlady was particularly important, and in Kings Cross and Darlinghurst in particular, there were known boarding houses where the landlady was tolerant of homosexuality.[76] Thus far there has not been a definitive history of Melbourne's gay world at this time, but one can assume that a similar situation existed here, especially in St Kilda and perhaps in other inner areas.[77] It is also likely that lesbians would have lived in these places, and given that it was not unusual for two women to share a room, many lesbian couples may have lived their lives relatively unsuspected and unaccosted.[78]

People involved in the entertainment industry also found these places convenient and tolerant of unconventional behaviour. Grace and Gilbert Parker moved to the Palace Court guest house in Beaconsfield Parade in 1932.[79] They were self-styled 'theatrical people', involved in the entertainment industry and attracted to St Kilda because of its amusements – 'its always been a spot'. The Parkers rented a room with full board for four pounds ten shillings per week for the two of them. The tariff included 'a full menu, a beautiful breakfast always', and a cut lunch for

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[76] G. Wotherspoon, *'City of the Plain': a History of a Gay Sub-Culture*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1991, pp. 70–72.

[77] Although there are no definitive histories of interwar gay Melbourne, several people have published essays on aspects of gay life. For a discussion on 'beats' see Graham Carbery, 'Some Melbourne Beats: A 'Map' of a Subculture from the 1930s to the 1950s', in R. Aldrich and G. Wotherspoon (eds), *Gay Perspectives: Essays in Australian Gay Culture*, Department of Economic History, University of Sydney, 1992, pp. 131–145. Carbery argues that the 'Peanut Farm' in St Kilda was a well-known and heavily utilised gay meeting spot from at least the 1920s, 'but certainly in the 1930s and 1940s there was plenty of action there at night', p. 136; Graham Willett has studied gay life in Australia including in Melbourne, in the 1950s, but there is little else in the way of sustained research. See G. Willett, 'The Darkest Decade: Homophobia in 1950s Australia', in J. Murphy and J. Smart (eds), *The Forgotten Fifties: Aspects of Australian Society and Culture in the 1950s*, MUP, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 120–132; Wider studies of male homosexuality in Australia also include Craig Johnston and Robert Johnston, 'The Making of Homosexual Men', in V. Burgmann and J. Lee (eds), *Staining the Wattle: A People's History of Australia Since 1788*, McPhee Gribble/ Penguin, Melbourne, 1988, pp. 87–99.

[78] The best study of lesbianism in Melbourne is Ruth Ford's study based on the life and recollections of Ethel May (Monte) Punshon, a non-declared lesbian woman. Ford argues that Monte and her lover were able, like other lesbians 'to live together as a couple without any stigma of homosexuality and were seen as close friends'. See R. Ford, 'Speculating on Scrapbooks, Sex and Desire: Issues in Australian History', *Australian Historical Studies*, 106, 1996, pp. 111–126.

[79] St Kilda Oral History Project, Grace and Gilbert Parker.

those who needed it. It also included all their 'washing, all the household washing, the linen was all done'. Palace Court attracted a 'nice class of people', according to Grace, but it also appears to have been a lively place, perhaps because of its show business clientele. Grace and Gilbert were very proud of their association with the rich and the famous and seem to have been determined to list the names of their illustrious acquaintances to their interviewers. Their next door neighbour was Mrs Grant, 'a very big racehorse owner' who was an 'extremely wealthy woman'. Another resident was 'Daybreak Don', 'one of the very early broadcasters'. Phyllis Glen, 'a very famous French actress in the early days of Maurice Chevalier', also lived at Palace Court, as did members of the 'Rhythm Boys' a jazz band that supported Bing Crosby on his tour of Australia. Asked about their relationship with the other tenants, Grace noted that they all knew each other very well, while Gilbert, after prompting from the interviewer, agreed that Palace Court was 'more like a community of people' than simply a boarding house.

East Melbourne boarding houses were also popular with members of the entertainment industry. Fairlie Taylor argues that Chequers attracted an unusual crowd, including the musically- and theatrically-oriented. She attributed this to its proximity to the city's theatres. Similarly, Kathleen Fitzpatrick argued that the Ritz attracted the bohemian and transient. She described Dr Archibald Strong of the English Department at the University of Melbourne as the 'star boarder' of the establishment who, with his courtesy and bookishness, 'lent great *ton*' to the place. Other guests included theatrical types who frequented the Ritz because of its nearness to the city's theatres. Bella Vista's guests were also said to be 'Theatrical personalities', some of whom were reputed to have come to boarding houses from overseas, presumably on the recommendation of others. Grace Ware's evidence of Bella Vista's alleged bohemia was essentially based on the fact that one 'of the "permanents" was Miss Marion Marcus-Clarke, a sister of the author who wrote "For the term of his natural life"' (sic).[80]

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[80] An Ethel Marian Clarke is listed as a resident of Bella Vista in the 1936 electoral roll.

Unlike in the boarding houses of Sam Goldbloom's memory, meal-times in well-to-do boarding houses were important and highly-structured affairs. From Illawarra to the Ritz and on to Bella Vista and Chequers, dinner time was an occasion that required guests to be seated according to elaborate codes of status and importance. At Illawarra guests were served meals in a communal dining room where each family had its own table. Dinner was a formal occasion with guests expected to dress accordingly, and each family expected to arrive and enter the dining room as a single family group. Guests were waited on by the butler and 'two or three parlourmaids', except on Sundays, the parlourmaids' day off, when a self-serve smorgasbord-style meal was provided with only the butler in attendance.[81] At the Ritz, Katherine Fitzpatrick's family had its 'own table in the dining-room, where the meals were abundant and delicious', while at Chequers, 'Mr Pearson liked his regulars to change tables from time to time' in order to mix with all the guests. Even at Alan Marshall's smaller boarding house, the guests were always expected to sit in the same places at the dinner table.[82] Grace Ware told of elaborate mealtime rituals at Tasma in which vegetables were served in 'silver (EPNS) dishes'. She claimed to have some of these, as well as 'fruit knives and forks and a beautiful tall glass fruit dish' from the guest house still in her possession.[83]

For all tenants the amenities and services provided in the tariff was an important aspect of the decision to board. As we have seen for men – and for women who were unable or unwilling to look after themselves for that matter – the boarding house keeper acted as a surrogate mother-cum-charwoman. Lenore Davidoff's study of boarding in Britain suggests that for the middle-class, the ability to buy the services of the poor and the working class was an assumed right, 'much in the

[81] J. Paxton, *Toorak As I Knew It*, p. 20.

[82] F. Taylor, *Time Recalled*, p. 98; K. Fitzpatrick, *Solid Bluestone Foundations*, p. 122; A. Marshall, *This Is the Grass*, p. 107.

[83] Letter, Grace Ware to National Trust

manner of Third World countries today'.[84] She also notes that 'the creation of a special domestic sphere with higher standards of cooking, cleaning, laundry and mending, had promoted male expectations of being "serviced" by women'.[85] Middle-class women also benefited from this assumption. In an age before restaurants were as plentiful as they are today, boarding house proprietors would sell meals to non-residents living in the local area. Each day Betty Malone's mother, for instance, would feed several women who were unable or unwilling to cater for themselves. All were women who lived in apartment houses or flats, who Betty remembers as 'very precise ladies', who 'paid two shillings for their evening meal'.[86]

Time and again in discussions of their own experiences, boarding house tenants refer to the quality of the meals, but also to the level of service in regard to laundering and mending provided. That it would be done, and done by a woman was assumed. Similarly in most boarding houses all linen and towels would be supplied, so tenants could move in or out with few personal possessions. This was especially important to young men like Sam Goldbloom who owned no personal items such as linen, let alone cutlery or cooking utensils until he and his wife went out and bought them after their marriage.[87] His entire possessions for much of the 1930s consisted of a bag containing his clothes and a few personal items. At Mrs Blay's house in Armadale tenants were looked after totally. As well as all meals there were 'plenty of blankets..., all your sheets, you got all your washing done'. Tenants were also supplied with all towels and other manchester, and their ironing and mending was done for them. '"All found", they used to call it'.[88]

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[84] L. Davidoff, 'Separation', p. 75. Davidoff was writing in 1979, but had she been writing today she may have noted that this assumption has again become the norm in some Western countries. Social commentators today suggest that the time-poor but financially well-off are increasingly buying-in household and personal services from the time-rich but economically poor. See 'The Helping Class', *Weekend Australian*, 28–29 September 1996; H. McKay, 'Do the world a favour: Avoid the housework', *Weekend Australian*, 25–26 October 1997, p. 2.

[85] Ibid, p. 76.

[86] Betty Malone. Interview.

[87] Sam Goldbloom, Interview.

[88] Betty Malone, Interview.

Nor did tenants have any need for their own furniture. Advertisements for boarding houses would stress the quality of their furniture and fittings. At Mrs Blay's each room came with 'a nice big bed – single bed', as well as a 'good wardrobe', a dressing table, and a table and a chair 'if you wanted it'. In Sam Goldbloom's experience the furniture in most boarding houses consisted of a 'bed – usually a single bed, a small table, and a wardrobe', and occasionally 'a chest of drawers'. Because they had no possessions, tenants could up and leave whenever they liked, simply packing their bags and going to the next place if the fancy took them or if necessity forced their departure.

Not needing personal possessions was a boon to women as well as men, the old as well as the young. A resident of Delgetti in South Yarra is perhaps indicative of a type of woman who used to reside in the more affluent boarding houses. Her name is Marion Aitken, a spinster who first appears in the electoral rolls as a resident of Delgetti in 1912 and who left only upon her death aged seventy-three in 1940.[89] She had therefore lived there for at least twenty-eight years from the time she was forty-five. Marion wasn't poor like Sam Goldbloom or on a limited income like some of Mrs Blay's tenants. She left an estate of almost 7500 pounds, mostly in the form of an income from her father's estate. Nor was she short of liquid assets as she had almost 450 pounds in a bank account when she died.[90] But what is fascinating about Marion, and is perhaps indicative of the boarding house culture, is that she had virtually no personal possessions. Her probate states that her entire furniture and household effects were valued at only twenty six pounds.[91]

This lack of a need for personal possessions and household goods is what made boarding attractive, especially to single men and women who didn't need to spend money on buying and keeping up furniture, crockery, cooking utensils, and perhaps even linen. In most places they would also not have been liable for their

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[89] Victorian death number 4536, Isabella Marion Stenhouse Aitken, 14 May 1940.

[90] PROV, VPRS 7951/P2 Will and Probate No. 313 546, Isabella Marion Stenhouse Aitken.

[91] Ibid.

own food bills. Not having these expenses was attractive to people on fixed, but limited incomes, who after paying rent had no other expenses while in the boarding house. It is also safe to assume that for a woman of Marion Aitken's background, the service provided at Delgetti must have also been an attractive incentive to stay on in residence, rather than fend for herself in a flat. Marion's age meant that unlike many others of her social status she was forced to remain in boarding houses even as they lost some of their status. She in a sense became trapped, unable because of age and possibly infirmity to move to another form of accommodation. Her privileged background possibly also meant that she would have been unable to carry out the domestic tasks that were a part of independent living by the 1930s.

Other facilities provided in boarding houses were also important. In the larger places tenants were able to play games, retire to drawing or lounge rooms, or simply use the garden for relaxation. But the convenience and relative cheapness of boarding houses did have one major drawback – a lack of privacy. Tenants, and proprietors and their families for that matter, virtually lived in a fishbowl, on public display at all times. As we have seen, meals were almost always taken communally, and in many establishments residents were expected, or at least felt obliged, to engage in social activity with other guests, usually in the common lounge. Tenants could retreat to the privacy of their own rooms, but in some cases even here they were expected to share, especially if they were related. Newspaper advertisements would sometimes advise that rooms were available that would suit two friends or a married couple who were expected to share all facilities, and thus create a windfall gain for the proprietor.[92]

In most houses every room was used either for accommodation or as dining or lounge rooms. There were no spare rooms. Betty Malone's mother even introduced a female tenant into the bedroom she and her mother already shared. An outcome of this sharing of rooms and houses was the high average number of

inmates in non-private dwellings. In St Kilda for instance, the average number of residents in these places in 1921 was 10.67, whereas the average per private dwelling was 4.25.[93] It also meant that even before the large-scale development of flats in areas like St Kilda the population density was quite high. Again using 1921 as an example, St Kilda's average population density was 18.83 per acre, similar to the average for working-class Port Melbourne, whereas in an equally built-up but a more single-family dwelling type area such as Hawthorn the figure was only 12.15.[94]

Privacy was intruded upon in other ways. Even at a time when personal hygiene wasn't considered as important as it is today, and weekly baths were the norm, bathrooms were busy places, taxed to their limits.[95] At Illawarra five families shared two bathrooms which were segregated by sex – '[w]estside for ladies and east for men'. Toilets were also at a premium as they were in the bathrooms. Consequently, the 'outside men's lavatory near the garages...was often a lifesaver'.[96] At Palace Court in St Kilda, Grace and Gilbert Parker shared a bathroom 'with about two or three other rooms. To about every three rooms there was a bathroom and we were very fortunate because the bathroom was right outside our door'.[97] At Mrs Blay's in Armadale there was only one bathroom, with 'a big bath with a shower in the bath', and 'one of those chip heater things'. Fortunately tenants were usually male because they were required to use the

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[92] An advertisement for a room in Dalgety Street, St Kilda in 1925, for instance stated that it would 'suit 2 gentlemen', *Age* 31 January 1925; Note also that Evelyn Clowes refers to this practice of sharing rooms in *On the Wallaby*, p. 31.

[93] *Census*, 1921. Note these figures are for all non-private dwellings and so include institutions and hospitals as well as boarding and lodging houses.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Betty Malone, Interview; Very little research has been done on the history of Australia's bathing habits. Edel Wignell has briefly looked at these in the nineteenth century as part of her study of Melbourne's city baths, as has Jennifer Bailey in a similar study. But in comparison with, say, Sueellen Hoy's study of American bathing habits, we have little knowledge other than the anecdotal. See E. Wignell, 'From Hygiene to Recreation'. *This Australia*, Summer 1984/5, pp. 60–64; J. Bailey, 'Cleansing the Great Unwashed: Melbourne City Baths', in G. Davison and A. May, (eds), *Melbourne Centre Stage: The Corporation of Melbourne 1842–1992*. Victorian Historical Journal, Vol. 63, Nos. 2 and 3, October 1992, pp. 141–153; S. Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness*, OUP, New York, 1995, Ch. 4, 'The American Way'.

[96] J. Paxton, *Toorak As I Knew It*, p. 20.

bathroom 'in tandem. One would go in and have his wash, the other would come in and have his shower, or whatever it was, and the other would be shaving.' Times would be rostered with the younger men first, followed by their elders, whose morning were not as rushed because their workdays began an hour later than the younger clerks. Baths would be had 'off-times – night time or something like that when the bathroom wasn't needed'. Betty Malone complains that she rarely got access to the bathroom, except for her weekly bath. She was reliant on a basin in her room for her daily wash.[98]

There was also the problem of entertaining friends and courting. The latter was a major problem for young women whose reputation could be easily sullied by any apparent lapse from the strict rules governing social and sexual behaviour. Members of the Victorian Women's Catholic Social Guild worried that boarding houses left no respectable places for young men and women to mix. A writer in 1921 complained that because most boarding houses were poorly equipped to deal with guests' visitors, young women who wanted 'to have a talk or a game of cards with their men friends, who may be their sweethearts or relations, or agreeable acquaintances, must either ask them into their bedrooms or meet them in the streets or parks'.[99] The moral danger here was implied, but the danger to young womens' reputations was spelt out in the story of a young woman forced to leave a boarding house after innocent language lessons from a male teacher in her room were misconstrued by her landlady, who 'found the arrangement so distasteful that the girl had to go'.[100]

Even where there was no moral danger involved, guests in boarding houses, bar those with suites of rooms, had nowhere to entertain in private, other than in their

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[97] Grace and Gilbert Parker, SLV Manuscript.

[98] B. Malone, Interview.

[99] *Woman's Social Work*, October 1921, pp. 10–11.

[100] Ibid. The next chapter will further discuss the increased concern at the moral danger faced by women in boarding houses in the 1920s.

bedrooms.[101] Lounge rooms were provided in most houses but these were usually for tenants to talk, play cards, read, or simply relax. The types of amusements engaged in were also reflective of the social status of the house. At Alan Marshall's boarding house in East Melbourne the lounge was used for musical evenings every Sunday. These occasions included singing, piano and violin playing, with all tenants expected to contribute in some way.[102] But again, this was essentially for tenants, not their guests or friends. At Mrs Blay's there was a lounge for tenants. It contained a wireless set, and each tenant was provided with an armchair in which they 'read or did what they wanted to'. But there was no pressure on tenants to socialise if they did not wish to. Betty Malone and her brother didn't socialise, electing to stay in the dining room, in order to maintain at least some privacy in their lives. The crowding involved in living in a boarding house also meant that any conversations held in the lounge room would be automatically overheard by other tenants. As we have seen for Betty Malone, the fear that she would be laughed at if she brought a man home, has affected her attitudes to privacy and personal space in the period since.[103]

In Sam Goldbloom's experience, there was little social interaction between tenants. Most would retire to their rooms or go out with mates or friends rather than socialise together. This may be a result of the more working-class nature of the boarding houses he stayed in, or perhaps reflective of the merging of boarding and lodging houses that was occurring by the late 1930s. The one exception to this lack of socialising in Sam's experience was at Mrs Crystal's guest house, where there was a common religious/ethnic bond. Sam also found the camaraderie of this place a relief from the increasing concern he felt at the rise of anti-

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[101] Wealthier residents of the more affluent establishments would entertain and have 'at homes' at their boarding houses. *Table Talk* would often feature announcements that a particular woman was 'at home' at one of the more fashionable boarding houses in South Yarra, Toorak or St Kilda. On 25 May 1911, for instance it was announced that 'Mrs C. Sloman has left her house Quamby, Crimea-street, St Kilda and taken rooms at Emilton, Barkly-street, St Kilda, where she will be pleased to see her friends', while on 10 August of the same year, a similar notice announced that 'Mrs H Clark Morgan will be at home at Inverleith, 12 Acland-street St Kilda, the second Friday of each month'.

[102] A. Marshall, *This is the Grass*, p. 105.

[103] B. Malone, Interview.

Semitism at home and abroad.[104] At his mother's more middle-class guest house in St Kilda Road, on the other hand, tenants would retire to the communal lounge room after dinner where they would play cards, sit and chat or read, or more often in Sam's words, 'argue about who got the chair near the fire'.[105]

Conclusion

It is not possible to classify boarding houses as either the preserve of the very poor or the very rich. In the early years of the century, there were many that catered to the latter, but the former tended to stay in lodging houses. It is possible to suggest, however, that individual boarding houses tended to be peopled by single classes, and that there were few places in which one found the wealthy and not-so-wealthy co-residing. Individual boarding houses, or boarding houses in certain areas also gained particular reputations. Thus in South Yarra and Toorak one could find well-to-do boarding houses that catered both to visitors to the city, and to long-term guests who frequented the houses because of their comfort, convenience and service, rather in the same manner as many wealthy people choose five-star hotels today.

In other areas such as East Melbourne and St Kilda one found boarding houses that catered for a bohemian clientele of writers and actors, some of whom were homosexuals and lesbians. East Melbourne catered for these people as well as those who saw themselves as being slightly unconventional, no matter what the reality of their actual situation. In St Kilda a curious mixture of well-to-do and bohemian boarding houses could be found, although the clientele of any one establishment rarely seems to have been mixed. In most areas, one also found boarding houses that catered for tenants who were permanent and those who were short-term holiday-makers or travellers. The opportunity to mix with a range of

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[104] See Chapter Five for a discussion of the concerns of the various religions that members, especially younger members, should board with their co-religionists.

[105] S. Goldbloom, Interview.

people in these circumstances may have been an attraction of boarding house life, especially to the young and the adventurous.

Tenants would seek out boarding houses that best suited their needs or their pockets. The decision to reside in a certain place would be based on reputation, by advertised features, or by word-of-mouth recommendation. Features sought in a boarding house included comfort, convenience, camaraderie, and importantly, the quality of the food and service provided. Those who could afford to also sought extras such as grounds and recreational facilities. Decisions would also be based on whether one intended to reside permanently in a place or simply holiday there. Thus someone looking to stay in St Kilda for the summer sought recreational facilities and access to the beach and nightlife, whereas someone looking to reside permanently in St Kilda Road would seek out respectability and a certain level of 'tone' in their choice of establishment.

But much of this gradation appears to have collapsed during the 1920s and 1930s. The next chapter will explore the various government restrictions put on boarding houses after the First World War and during the 1920s. These restrictions implied that in the later years of this study the authorities, and by extension the wider public, felt that the distinction between boarding houses and some of the more disreputable lodging houses of the city and inner suburbs had collapsed. A growing concern was expressed by religious and other social groups at the problems faced by young people, especially young women, coming to Melbourne in search of employment. Part of this concern centred around the dangers the young faced living in boarding houses, perhaps in the company of older men and women whose social and sexual behaviour were somewhat suspect. The outcome of this concern was, as we shall see in Chapter Five, the creation of a series of mainly religious-based hostels ringing central Melbourne, where young 'business girls' could reside in frugal comfort. Their parents. whether at home on the farm or interstate or overseas could rest easy, sure in the knowledge that their daughters' moral and religious well-being was being carefully supervised.

Chapter Four

`The Movement to Control Boarding Houses

Introduction

The status of boarding houses, and by implication that of their tenants, began to change as the twentieth century wore on. After the First World War, as part of the *Health Act* of 1919, boarding houses came under similar controls to those which had been in place for lodging houses since 1854. These essentially required them to be registered with local councils and become subject to municipal inspection and control.[1] Later, under the *Health Act* of 1928 they came under even stricter controls that forced proprietors to keep a register of all tenants, their usual place of address, and their date of arrival at, and departure from, the premises.[2] Boarding houses, in effect, came to be classified in a similar manner to hotels and lodging houses. A study of these rules and the debates that surrounded their introduction gives an insight into the changing face and status of the boarding house in the interwar years. It is at this time, I would suggest, that boarding houses began to resemble lodging houses in reflecting something of the 'zone of transition' model, coming to be seen – in some instances rightly – as places of accommodation for the poorer members of society and those outside the traditional model of respectable suburbia.

The very existence of boarding house provisions in the *Health Acts* suggests that these places were beginning to lose some of their status. Although, as we have seen, many of their residents were still middle- and upper-class members of society, a decline in status opened the way for governmental interference in their operation. As Lenore Davidoff has suggested, the British Acts interfering with the operation of lodging houses in the early 1850s, represented a form of 'moral panic'

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[1] *Health Act*, 1919.

on the part of the middle-class and its governing representatives about the living arrangements of the poor.[3] In Victoria too, we can see these Acts as reflecting concern about regulating and controlling the health, morals, behaviour and living arrangements of a section of society that was increasing in size and some of whose behaviour was becoming alien and threatening to some important sections of the middle-class.

Social Policy and the 'Nature versus Nurture' Debate

The registration of boarding houses was part of a push by representatives of the middle-class to regulate the lives and the moral behaviour of those they believed to be their social and physical inferiors. Members of the professional middle-class, both in Australia and overseas, had been voicing concern about the living conditions and breeding patterns of the poor since the late nineteenth century.[4] Eugenicists and other social commentators worried that the poor and the 'unfit' were outbreeding their 'betters', and that in urban areas especially there was a danger of them creating a 'permanently enfeebled and degenerate city race'.[5] Writers in the years since have debated whether in Australia that concern went from a policy of amelioration of social problems including health and housing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to a more sinister program of intervention based on eugenic theory, as the problems of the city appeared to mount and multiply.

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[2] Victorian Statutory Rules, 1930, &c *Health Act— Regulations*, Health Act 1928, Victorian *Government Gazette*, (No. 106), 24th September 1930, Part II Division 12.

[3] L. Davidoff, 'Separation'.

[4] There is a large body of literature on eugenics and national or social efficiency movements. The best known British study is GR Searle's, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899–1914*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1971; In the United States it is Richard Hofstadter's, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1992 (This is a revised edition with an introduction by Eric Foner. The book was first published by University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1944).

[5] G. Davison, 'The city-bred child and urban reform in Melbourne 1900–1940', in P. Williams (ed), *Social process and the city*, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1983, p.144.

Mary Cawte argues that there was never an ameliorative aspect to attempts to deal with the problems of the poor. She suggests that from the late nineteenth century there was a strong authoritarian and eugenicist streak in those who dealt with these problems, that was 'imperialist, self-congratulatory and social Darwinist'.[6] The protagonists, in her opinion, simply went from a mildly-eugenicist position before the First World War, to an open and aggressive stance after. Carol Bacchi has argued the opposite, suggesting that for most of the early years of this century Australian social reformers followed a policy that sought to use environmental reform to 'surmount the problems of the Old World'. She goes on to suggest, however, that in the years leading up to the Great War and in the years immediately after, the debate began to be won by the eugenicists who increasingly took a 'more deterministic slant' in their approach to the poor and those they considered 'unfit', and began to advocate sterilisation and other controls over their lives.[7] Graeme Davison largely agrees, arguing that in Australia, 'commentators generally leaned towards the optimistic environmentalism' of the American rather than the British type. He goes on to suggest, however, that in the later interwar years, and in the face of the seemingly intractable social problems exposed by the Depression and its aftermath, many began to look toward more eugenicist solutions to the problems of the city, including, if necessary by 'the forcible removal of children from the slum environment'.[8]

Other writers have disagreed and suggested that these years saw a raft of legislation that was 'environmentalist' in its approach. Kerreen Reiger's account of the modernisation of the Australian family from the 1880s to 1940 suggests that in the interwar years many ameliorative laws were passed that improved

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[6] M. Cawte, 'Craniometry and Eugenics in Australia: RJA Berry and the Quest for Social Efficiency', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 86, April 1986, p. 36.

[7] C. Bacchi, 'The Nature–Nurture Debate in Australia, 1900–1914', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 75, October 1980, p. 200; Bacchi also contributed a piece on a similar subject to the 'Woman, Class and History' collection of 1980. See C. Bacchi, 'Evolution, Eugenics and Women: the Impact of Scientific Theories on Attitudes towards Women, 1870–1920', in E. Windschuttle (ed), *Women, Class and History: Feminist Perspectives on Australia 1788–1988*, Fontana/Collins, Melbourne, 1980, pp. 132–156.

conditions in housing and in the provision of child-care. Some advocates of extreme measures existed, she admits, but '[o]n the whole...Australian social reformers...directed their energies to improving the housing and health conditions of women and children as their contribution to environment conducive to regeneration of the race'.[9] Stephen Garton argues that environmentalism and hereditarianism always went hand-in-hand in Australia. He believes that reformers like Charles Mackellar and his contemporaries 'were concerned with public health, infant and maternal welfare and education', and that their policies in all of these areas were considered 'essential to the success of progressive social reform'.[10] In a later article he reaffirms this point and argues that 1980s and 1990s research into social welfare and reform, suggests that 'the easy dichotomy of pre-war optimistic environmentalism and inter-war pessimistic hereditarianism seems difficult to sustain'.[11]

There was an immediate concern involved in the discussion of health and community well-being in Victoria in 1919 – around the time of the *Health Act*. The influenza epidemic of that year raised concerns across Australia about cleanliness and the spread of disease. Humphrey McQueen argues that the 'flu epidemic engendered 'fear' and panic in some circles. Several commentators saw links between the 'flu and the 'plague' and 'black death', and successfully called for severe restraints on civil liberties and freedom of movement.[12] Jack Camm's study of the epidemic located the major affected areas as the capital cities, with 'a

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[8] G. Davison, 'City-Bred Child', pp. 146 and 165.

[9] K. Reiger, *The disenchantment of the home*, p. 195.

[10] S. Garton, 'Sir Charles Mackellar: Psychiatry, Eugenics and Child Welfare in New South Wales, 1900–1914', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 86, April 1986, p. 34.

[11] S. Garton, 'Sound minds and healthy bodies: Re-considering Eugenics in Australia, 1914–1940', *Australian Historical Studies*, No. 103, October 1994, p. 165; For a discussion of eugenics in Australian schooling see, David Kirk and Karen Twigg, 'Regulating Australian Bodies: Eugenics, Anthropometrics and School Medical Inspection in Victoria, 1900–1940', *History of Education Review*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1994, pp. 19–37.

[12] H. McQueen, 'The "Spanish" Influenza Pandemic in Australia, 1918–1919', in J. Roe (ed), *Social Policy in Australia: Some Perspectives 1901–1975*, Cassell, Sydney, 1976, pp. 131–147. (Earlier versions of this article also appear in *Journal of History for Senior Students*, Vol. IV, No. 4, September 1975, pp. 85–107, and *Medical Journal of Australia*, 3 May 1975, pp. 565–570.); Also see Anthea Hyslop's contribution on 'Epidemics' in G. Davison, J. Hirst and S. Macintyre (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, OUP, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 220–1.

high correlation between urban living and death'.[13] Yet in the debates on the *Health Act* in Victoria, barely six months after the worst of the crisis, hardly any mention was made of the 'flu epidemic or its causes. The one exception was the lower house member for East Melbourne, Mr Farthing, who asked the Premier if local councils would be able to 'spend money to cope with epidemic diseases, such as the influenza epidemic we have just passed through?' The Premier replied in the affirmative.[14] The manner of dealing with this argument would appear to add weight to the 'optimist' argument, because had Victoria been moving toward more authoritarian control of disease and social problems one could reasonably expect more to have been made of this epidemic in the discussion of the general health of the community.

The boarding house regulations were, however, part of a reaction to the perceived decline in moral standards during the war and early postwar years. The major and most obvious outcome of this decline was the Venereal Disease (VD) scares of the war and postwar years. Judith Smart supports the more pessimistic end of the social reform argument by suggesting that the war 'encouraged coercive and authoritarian solutions and undermined the more liberal and idealistic proposals for social change'.[15] She sees the 1916 and 1918 Victorian VD Acts as responses to the apparent increase in the incidence of both venereal diseases and prostitution associated with the war, and the concerns felt by some in the community that VD was 'rife' in the armed forces. Carol Bacchi agrees, arguing that '[v]enereal disease came to represent one of the most serious challenges to the health of the race', and was especially alarming because it could be passed on to 'innocent' wives and children by infected males.[16]

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[13] J. Camm, 'The "Spanish" Influenza Pandemic: Its Spread and Pattern of Mortality in New South Wales During 1919', *Australian Historical Geography*, No. 6, September 1984, p. 14; For a more personalised discussion of the epidemic see Kathleen Woodgate, 'The Spanish flu epidemic', in ABC Radio's 'Word of Mouth', (eds), *Voices from a vanishing Australia: Recollections of the way things used to be*, ABC Books, Sydney, 1988, pp. 44–47.

[14] Victoria, Parliamentary Debates Vol. 153, 1 October 1919, p. 1445.

[15] J. Smart, 'Feminists, Labour Women and Venereal Disease in Early Twentieth-Century Melbourne', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 15, Autumn 1992, p. 34.

[16] C. Bacchi, 'Nature–Nurture', p. 209.

Julie Tisdale's work on VD in Melbourne in the war and early interwar years, suggests that the target of concern increasingly moved from prostitutes to the 'amateur' – sexually-liberated, young working-class woman. She argues that the new laws brought in to control VD were part of an effort to police the activities of 'bold, sexually assertive young women, attempting to evade the strictures of their parents, employers, and the police in order to take full advantage of the opportunities they found for freedom and heterosexual pleasure' in the war and interwar years.[17] Dennis Shoesmith has also investigated the 'new woman' of this period and the concerns felt in some quarters about her social and sexual activities. He claims that conservatives were alarmed at the apparent decline in morals represented by the 'flapper' and her male friends, who openly engaged in 'cocktail-drinking...cigarette-smoking' and other vices. He suggests that this new woman represented a 'sexual revolution that was probably more profound...than at any time since', and that this was both alarming and threatening to many in the community.[18] By the late teens, boarding houses were increasingly coming to be seen as similar to common lodging houses as the place of accommodation for the less well-off. The concerns raised about sexual freedom and its apparent associated problems of disease and indecorum, were linked to the concerns about behaviours in boarding houses, and the anonymity those at the lower end of the market offered their tenants.

The Drift to the City

Part of this concern about boarding houses and some of the behaviours considered acceptable in them was related to the increasing numbers of young men and women who were arriving in Melbourne in search of work. Most of this concern centred on young women coming to the city to take up new jobs being created or

[17] J. Tisdale, 'Venereal Disease and the Policing of the Amateur in Melbourne during World War 1', *Lilith: a feminist history journal*, Number 9, Autumn 1996, p. 46.

[18] D. Shoesmith, 'The new woman: The debate on the 'new woman' in Melbourne, 1919', *Politics*, VIII (2), November 1973, p. 319; Also see his 'Nature's Law: The venereal disease debate, Melbourne 1918–19', *ANU Historical Journal*, No. 9, December 1972, pp. 20–3.

made available to them in clerical and sales fields and to a lesser extent in the expanding manufacturing industries.[19] David Merrett's study of capital cities in the twentieth century suggests that in the period between the Censuses of 1921 and 1933, forty-two per cent of the population increase of the capitals was related to intrastate migration.[20] Anthony Ward attributes most of this growth to family groups, but suggests that single women accounted for a substantial minority.[21] A Royal Commission into this drift of population to the city reported in 1918 that the major causes of rural population decline were related to a lack of work opportunities, especially the closure of 'small industries and the removal of larger ones from country centres to the metropolitan areas', better wages and conditions in the city than country, and to the 'general dullness of country life'.[22]

Between 1933 and 1947 the national figure for intrastate migration rose to fifty-three per cent of total capital city population growth, although much of this growth probably occurred during the war years when jobs were created in the munitions industries. In Melbourne the percentage increase from intrastate migration in the interwar period was thirty-two per cent or 57,000 people, the second largest numerical and percentage figures after Sydney and Adelaide, respectively.[23] Melbourne's population increased by 459,053, or 62.5%, over this period from 766,506 in 1921 to 1,226,409 in 1947. This growth maintained the historical female bias in the population, and slightly increased it, with female population growth numbering 230,844 or 64%, while the male population grew by 199,059 or 61%. These quite large growth figures, especially of women migrants, in part reflect the decline in employment opportunities which was

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[19] For a discussion of the new jobs open to women during this period see Gail Reekie, 'Decently Dressed?: Sexualised Consumerism and the Working Woman's Wardrobe 1918–1923', in R. Francis and B. Scates (eds), *Women, Work and the Labour Movement in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand*, pp. 42–56.

[20] D. Merrett, *Australian Capital Cities in the Twentieth Century*, Monash Papers in Economic History, No. 4, Melbourne, 1977, Ch. 4; A later version of this study appears in JW McCarty and CB Shedvin (eds), *Australian Capital Cities*, pp. 171–198.

[21] A. Ward, 'The Development of Melbourne in the Interwar Years', p. 196.

[22] *Report of the Select Committee upon the Causes of The Drift of Population from Country Districts to the City*, Victoria, 1918.

[23] D. Merrett, *Australian Capital Cities*.

greater for women than men in rural areas, and correspondingly the opportunities were much greater in the cities. They also perhaps reflect the Royal Commission finding that life was considered dull in the country, and young women may have been more attracted to the bright lights and opportunities provided by the city.

This drift to the city was not new and had been a feature of Victorian life for much of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Patricia Grimshaw, Charles Fahey and Melanie Raymond attribute much of South Melbourne's growth in the 1880s to 'a migration of young Australians from the declining gold fields towns (Ballarat, Clunes, Maldon and Bendigo)', as well as South Australia, Tasmania and across the Tasman from New Zealand, 'into booming Melbourne'.[24] John Lack notes the same phenomenon in Footscray but argues that it became more compelling through the 1920s and again after the Depression in the later 1930s. Declining goldfields towns were an important source of migrants to Melbourne up until the Second World War, and, as Lack argues, provided the city with 'labouring folk, young couples with large families of young children, anxious to give them the educational and job opportunities available in the 'big smoke'.[25]

After the introduction of the new industrial tariffs from 1920 new jobs became available in the manufacturing industries, mainly in the factories established by local firms or the subsidiaries of multinationals who set up local operations to avoid the tariff wall.[26] But most of these jobs went to men. Male jobs in these fields increased in Melbourne by almost 75,000 from 115,000 to 190,000 in the twenty-six years 1921 to 1947. Employment in manufacturing and industry, however, remained static at about 47% of the male workforce. The largest percentage increase in the male employment over this period was in the professions which grew from 23,000 to 41,000, although the professions remained

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[24] J. Beer, C. Fahey, P. Grimshaw and M. Raymond, *Colonial Frontiers and Family Fortunes: Two Studies of Rural and Urban Victoria*, Melbourne University History Monograph No. 6, Melbourne, 1989, p. 93.

[25] J. Lack, *A History of Footscray*, p. 117.

at about 10% of the male workforce. From at least the 1880s and probably earlier, working-class women had been in Melbourne's industrial workforce, mainly involved in the clothing, footwear and similar industries.[27] The 1920s manufacturing expansion opened some new positions to them, but the effects on overall female manufacturing employment were negligible. Female employment in manufacturing increased from 37,633 women in 1921 to 52,270 in 1947. Both figures represented about 37% of the female workforce.

Middle-class women were able to gain employment in the expanding clerical and professional sectors that catered to Melbourne's growing population. White-collar employment grew substantially in the interwar years and many of these jobs, especially in teaching and other 'caring' occupations went to women. The number of females employed in Melbourne in 'professional' jobs including teaching and nursing almost doubled in the interwar years from under 15,000 to over 28,000. Similarly, women employed in commercial and communications pursuits went from 17,224 in 1921 to 29,195 in 1947. Those employed as domestics, on the other hand, dropped from 23,048 in 1921 to 20,588 in 1947, with the latter number also including those employed in hotels and cafes as well as in personal service. The number of women employed in domestic service in Melbourne expressed in percentage terms, therefore, declined from almost 23% of the female workforce in 1921 to 13% in 1947. In contrast those employed in professional and clerical pursuits went from 34% of all female workers to 42%.[28] The decline of domestic service and the rise of these other occupations meant that more young women who were previously provided with accommodation as part of their employment, were looking for suitable, and inexpensive, accommodation in the city. Anthony Ward suggests that when these women moved to the city they

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[26] For a discussion of economic change in this period see C. Forster, *Industrial Development in Australia 1920–1930*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1964, esp Part 1, 'The twenties as a period of industrial growth'.

[27] Beverley Kingston uses figures compiled by Coghlan to show that 'in 1886, in Victoria, one in five of the industrial workforce was female. In 1907 it was one in two'. See B. Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary-Ann*, p. 60; Also see G. Davison, *Marvellous Melbourne*, Ch. 2 'The Old Spirit...Has Gone Out'; and T. Dingle, *The Victorians: Settling*, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates, Sydney, 1984, p. 167.

[28] All of the above information is derived from *Census* 1921, 1933 and 1947.

stayed in 'the boarding houses of Melbourne, Prahran and St Kilda', suburbs which developed a female population bias in the early interwar years.[29]

Although some commentators expressed concern about young men and the temptations they faced when they arrived in the city, they were mostly considered able to provide for their own accommodation, or as pointed out in Chapter Three, have a woman look after their needs. In a discussion of the problems women faced in housing, a leader writer of the *Argus* wrote as early as 1900 that the woman without shelter or a family home deserved sympathy and compassion, but that as a society we should waste no 'pity on young men in lodgings', for it 'is obligatory upon them to make their way in the world, to "rough it" for a while if necessary, and to achieve a home by industry of which they can offer to the woman of their heart's choice'.[30] Commentators did, however, express concern about women and girls who were deemed to be the guardians of moral purity and potential 'mothers of the race'. There was also a concern that a young woman –

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[29] A. Ward, 'The Development of Melbourne in the Interwar Years', p. 196.

[30] *Argus* 14 April 1900. Thanks to Katie Holmes for this reference; Beverley Kingston quotes a 1919 *Sydney Morning Herald* report of Miss Roberts, a lecturer at the Sydney Technical College who argued that a man did not need hostel accommodation because higher male wages enabled 'him to pay for his washing, board and other things'. See B. Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann*, p. 121; Young men were, however, catered for by the YMCA which opened new accommodation in South Melbourne in 1925; The Anglican Church appears to have been the only one of the major churches in Melbourne to have concerned itself with the welfare of both young men and women coming to the city by providing hostels for both. In 1923 the Church opened a hostel for young men in Richmond after Mr Clements Langford donated his house in Clifton Street for the purpose. A piece in the church newspaper, the *Messenger*, noted that 'one of the most pressing needs of the day is the provision of good boarding accommodation for young people, whom business calls to the city'. Netley, as the home was called, advertised in the weekly *Messenger*, as an 'Excellent, Comfortable Home, with the Best Kind Company', for 'Young Churchmen'. See Church of England *Messenger*, 18 January 1923 for editorial, 3 January 1924 and other dates for advertisements; Both the Catholic Church and the Methodist raised concerns about young men in the city, but were slow to do anything about providing accommodation for them. Samuel Hoban of the Wesley Central Mission argued in favour of a hostel for boys as early as 1926 with the opening of the Princess Mary Club (PMC). In the event nothing was done until Lincoln House, a hostel for boys coming to work in the city from the Boy's Home at Tally Ho, was established in King Street, Melbourne, in the early 1940s. See Central Mission, *Annual Report*, 1926–7 and 1942; The Catholic Church established the Don Bosco centre for young male workers in Brunswick in 1940, *Advocate*, 23 May 1940.

and especially the headstrong 'new woman' of the interwar years – was unable to truly see the moral and physical dangers she faced in the city.[31]

The nineteenth century ideal of womanhood stressed innocence and unworldliness as desirable virtues in women. Lack of knowledge of the outside world, and especially the vice associated with it, were cherished in middle- and upper-class women even into the early twentieth century. Lenore Davidoff, Jean L'Esperance and Howard Newby have argued that conservative nineteenth century interpretations of the ideal woman's nature saw her as essentially child-like and unable to make informed decisions about her needs, especially in relation to the outside world. They imply that this was especially the case when it came to knowledge of the city of which she was felt to be totally ignorant.[32] Sabine Willis has argued along similar lines in her discussion of the roles assigned to men and women by nineteenth century Protestant and other Christians. She suggests that the nuclear family became a metaphor for society as a whole, and within that family, man was the 'head', but 'woman became its spiritual guide and moral teacher'. Woman was the guardian of society's morals, but more importantly, '[o]n her fell the task of providing a haven and a refuge for her family away from the cares of the world'.[33] Young women, of course, should be pure and, in theory at least, totally ignorant of vice and immorality associated with the city. When they did come to the city, then, it was imperative that they have guardians to watch over and advise them on the city's ways.

While there was some public concern expressed over the plight of young working-class women in the city, most middle-class commentators appear to have

[31] For a discussion of the concerns felt about the so-called 'New Woman' in Australia, see Dennis Shoesmith, 'The new woman'; On 'Flappers' see, B. Cameron, 'The flapper and the feminists: A study of women's emancipation in the 1920s', in M. Bevege, M. James and C. Shute, (eds), *Worth Her Salt: Women at Work in Australia*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1982, pp. 257–269; On similar debates in America see M. Pumphrey, 'The flapper, the housewife and the making of modernity', *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1987, pp. 179–194.

[32] L. Davidoff, J. L'Esperance and H. Newby, 'Landscape with Figures: Home and Community in English Society', in J. Mitchell and A. Oakley, (eds), *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1977 (First published 1976), pp. 143–4.

expected them to have at least some idea of the ways of the city, and were not overly concerned about their welfare. Others simply assumed they were incorrigibly wayward, and as Tisdale and Smart point out, called for governmental controls on their behaviour. The major focus of concern and sympathy for these commentators were the young middle-class women moving to the city in search of work. Many of these women had previously been virtually forbidden from paid work and activities outside strictly-controlled parameters, and it was assumed, and was likely the case, that they more socially innocent than their working-class sisters. They were more ignorant of the potential moral and physical dangers they faced alone in the city. Shoesmith's investigation of the new women in Melbourne in 1919 suggests that many commentators found the idea of middle-class women working and joining urban life particularly troubling, although they recognised its apparent inevitability. He quotes a writer in the *Age* pointing out that 'it was no longer a term of reproach to affix the adjective "working" to the girl seeking employment'. Indeed, a middle-class girl who didn't work was now considered somewhat lazy and 'degenerate'.[34]

Religious and Press Concerns about Boarding Houses

Journalists in religious and secular newspapers and journals increasingly raised concerns about standards and behaviour in boarding houses in the interwar years. They were particularly concerned about the moral dangers young women coming to work in the city faced in such places. As early as 1917 writers in the Catholic *Advocate* wrote with concern about young women in the city having to 'seek lodgings where they can find them, with the dangers involved in so doing'.[35] Throughout the interwar years, writers in *Woman's Social Work* – the journal of the Catholic Women's Social Guild (CWSG) – expressed concerns about boarding houses and 'the common temptations' non-Catholic ones presented to unsuspecting girls and young women. These mainly related to the loss of religious

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[33] S. Willis, 'Homes are Divine Workshops', in E. Windschuttle (ed), *Women, Class and History*, p. 175.

[34] *Age*, 30 May 1919, quoted in Shoesmith, 'New Woman', p. 318.

devotion and duty, but reference was also made to '"White Slave Traffic" and other horrors'.

These Catholic writers were alarmed at the level of comfort and service in some of the cheaper boarding houses which they said were 'neither "comfortable" or "home-like"' in many cases.[36] Not only moral temptation, but standards of food, and the rigours of adhering to Catholic teachings on fasting before Communion were considered among the perils of boarding house life. As more women came to work in the city these concerns became more acute. Boarding houses were described in *Women's Social Work* in 1920 as 'comfortless uncompanioned' places, lacking good food and 'pleasant surroundings'. This was especially the case in those places at the bottom of the price scale, which were the only option for 'the strictly limited means of the working girl'.[37] Similar concerns about the threat to morals and health were apparent in advertisements in the same journal calling for the establishment of a register of '[o]wners of Catholic boarding-houses, who are willing to provide for Catholic girls'.[38]

In 1921, Agnes Murphy wrote that good boarding houses were on the decline in Melbourne, having been killed off by the combination of the 'high cost of food, engineered by our profiteering patriots, and the deplorable conditions imposed on girls in domestic employment'. The traditional boarding house – although problematic in many ways – she considered, good for working girls because it offered companionship by providing 'a dining or sitting room, or a general room where the meals were set out, and where, at other times the boarders met for social intercourse and the entertainment of their friends'. These types of houses had been replaced, Murphy alleged, by rooming houses in which all rooms were let out and no meals or common room provided. Even in the better class of boarding house, Catholics faced the possibility of losing their faith and devotion

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[35] *Advocate*, 12 May 1917.
[36] *Woman's Social Work*, August 1917.
[37] Ibid, June 1920.
[38] Ibid, October 1921.

to religious duty, because 'no provision is made for the observation of days of feast or abstinence' or to take breakfast after Mass. The choices for Catholics, in other words, were to ignore Church teaching on fasting before communion, to go without communion altogether, or to follow Church teachings but go without breakfast.[39]

A Catholic Women's Social Guild activist Louise (Lulu) Barry commented on the increase in white-collar female employees in the interwar years, and the consequent need for suitable accommodation for them. She argued in 1924 that the number of young women living in Melbourne was 'the direct outcome of a kind of social revolution, silent but sweeping, which has...resulted in the recruiting of a vast and growing army of women who work for their living'. The responsibility for this, she said, lay with 'Mr Remington' whose invention of the typewriter meant that most businessmen realised that 'a fluffy-haired maiden of sixteen could, in one hour, click off more replies to the kind favours of his customers, than any inky-fingered young man could write in half a day'. The result was 'the "business young lady" – shoals of her, and scores of business colleges yearly turning out still further shoals'. Like other Catholic commentators she raised doubts about whether boarding houses were the most appropriate places for these women to reside.[40]

Like the Catholic journals, the Wesley Central Mission's weekly *Spectator* raised concerns about untoward behaviour in 'what are believed to be respectable boarding houses', and the associated 'attempts that are being made by unscrupulous men to ruin unsuspecting girls' living in these places.[41] Writing in the *Spectator* in 1922, the Superintendent of the Mission, Reverend Samuel Hoban and some of his associates argued that there was 'nothing more urgently needed in Melbourne today than places of safety for girls', who because of the 'difficulty of getting suitable lodgings...are...exposed to the greatest moral peril'

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[39] Ibid.

[40] *Horizon*, September 1924.

[41] *Spectator*, 14 June 1922.

in boarding and lodging house accommodation. Particularly under threat, it was alleged, was the girl in the city without money or long-term employment. She was 'especially exposed to peril' and 'usually unaware of the dangers that surround her'. It was 'obviously the duty therefore of those who do know to protect her'.[42] A year later, the *Spectator* reported that some 'very distressing cases have come under our notice where girls in the city have been in dire peril because of the lack of suitable and safe accommodation' at an affordable price.[43]

The decline in the number of boarding houses and their changing status also troubled journalists in the non-religious press. In part this reflected the problems associated with the early postwar housing shortage, but it is also indicative of changing perceptions of the city and its residents. The *Truth* suggested in late 1919, for instance, that there were 'no homes for the homeless' in Melbourne, only 'houses, flats and barracks'.[44] Several months later it ran a tongue-in-cheek expose of boarding in which it suggested that in Melbourne, 'any place will do for a boarding house so long as there is a dining-room and a few small cubicles for people to sleep in'. 'A boarding house', the article went on,

> may be defined as a rectangular system divided by a series of straight lines. For instance there is one line towards but not to the bathroom, and there is one to the boarding-house table: also there are others, [such] as the one to the prettiest girl, who sits on the front verandah, and another to the drawing-room piano boy, the young clerk with the bathroom baritone and the young lady with the ragtime fingers.

The article then went on to list some of the common complaints about boarding house life, such as poor food, overbearing landladies, the 'boarding house bore', and others. At 'the Pearly Gates', the piece finished, 'we shall say to Peter: "Good-day, are there any boarding houses, landladies, or boarders in Heaven?", and Peter will reply, "No". We will then pass through, finding peace for the first time'.[45]

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid, 30 May 1923.

[44] *Truth*, 13 November 1919.

[45] 'All Aboard!', *Truth*, 31 January 1920.

In 1921, a writer in the *Herald* pointed to the problems faced by young women in boarding houses by arguing that they were unpopular with landladies and usually 'only taken on sufferance'. Young women, it was alleged, 'had to be very careful about giving themselves any airs or graces', or risk making themselves very unpopular with landladies and fellow tenants. The article went on to suggest the problem had been bad before the War, when females were simply 'unwelcome guests' but was now particularly acute, and women were 'not wanted at all'.[46] Four years later in 1925 the *Truth* similarly lamented the lack of suitable accommodation for young women 'who have to earn their own living away from home'. These women, it was argued, 'find it increasingly difficult to secure suitable accommodation', because boarding house keepers found them a nuisance, always wanting 'an iron to press a dress', or because 'they wash out their things in the bathroom'. The problem, it was alleged, was worst in country towns as there were so few other options available for boarding, but was also apparent in the city where increasingly the solution to the housing needs of young women was, as we shall see in the next chapter, coming to be seen as the specialised hostel for women.[47]

The 1919 *Health Act*

In October 1919 the Victorian Premier, Harry Lawson introduced a new Health Bill into the Legislative Assembly that had as one of its clauses a proposal to classify and impose minor controls on boarding houses. The Bill defined a boarding house as 'any house tent or edifice building or other structure, permanent or otherwise, and any and any part of such premises (not being the licensed premises of a licensed victualler) in which more than ten persons exclusive of the family of the proprietor thereof are lodged or boarded for hire or

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[46] *Herald*, 1 March 1921.

[47] *Truth*, 7 February 1925; Betty Malone's mother was not keen on female boarders. She took them if necessary, but found them a nuisance, 'always wanting to use the iron' and such. Betty also thinks her mother may have seen them as potential rivals for the position of 'queen' of the house. B. Malone, Interview.

reward from week to week or for more than a week'.[48] The laws basically allowed council officers to inspect boarding houses and ensure that they were properly classified, well-drained and cleaned, and that their food was hygienically stored. The measures, therefore, were not particularly far-reaching, and did not overly extend the hand of control into the respectable boarding house sector, but they did represent a start in this direction, and did suggest that government was beginning to become concerned with this sector of the housing market.

The Health Bill reflected some of the concerns expressed in the second progress report of the *Royal Commission on the Housing Conditions of the People in the Metropolis and in the Populous Centres of the State* that had been handed down in 1917.[49] This commission had found that in some places in Melbourne and in the nearby seaside resorts, there was little differentiation between rather seedy 'apartment houses', which were quite often delicensed hotels let out as 'furnished or unfurnished' rooms to singles, couples and families, and 'boarding houses of the poorer class'.[50] The commission had also found evidence that in some places boarding house operators subdivided larger rooms into smaller cubicles that could be let out individually, thus increasing profitability, but reducing amenity and privacy.

During the hearings of this Commission the Assistant Engineer of the Victorian Public Health Department gave evidence that during inspections of seaside resorts in and around Melbourne he had found

> permanent public boarding houses in which were several instances of ill-ventilated cubicles in which the floor space ranged from 28 to 56

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[48] Victoria, Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 153, 1 October 1919, p. 14.

[49] For a discussion of this Royal Commission and the earlier Select Committee see David Harris, 'Not Above Politics: Housing Reform in Melbourne 1910–1929', in R. Howe (ed), *New Houses for Old: Fifty Years of Public Housing in Victoria 1938–1988*, Ministry of Housing and Construction, Melbourne, 1988, pp. 1–19.

[50] *Royal Commission on the Housing Conditions of the People in the Metropolis and in the Populous Centres of the State, Second Progress Report (Sanitary Law and Administration, Sanitation of Houses, Ships, and Vessels)*, Victoria, *Parliamentary Papers*, No. 28, Vol. 2, p. 13.

square feet, and the gross air space from 281 to 567 cubic feet per lodger.[51]

The Commission's Report recommended that apartment houses should be legally differentiated from boarding and lodging houses and that they and boarding houses should come under the same supervisory regime as common lodging houses. It also recommended that all should be registered with local authorities who would have the power to refuse registration if, in the opinion of council inspectors, the house failed to meet appropriate standards of cleanliness and its proprietor suitable standards of 'character'. The committee also recommended that minimum standards of room size and ventilation be properly enforced.[52]

In introducing his Bill, Lawson avoided reference to the findings of the Royal Commission and its emphasis on some of the problems of Melbourne's boarding houses. Instead he insisted that the new controls were designed to deal with health and housing issues such as the 'objectionable congestion' and 'dreadfully overcrowded' conditions at resorts in Victoria.[53] The new laws were meant, he said, to protect the casual visitor to the seaside resort, who 'reads an alluring advertisement, and visits one of these places with his family', only to find 'there is no provision made for the sanitary convenience of the boarders'.[54] His speech in fact spent very little time on boarding houses in particular, rather including them in a series of changes being made to food and general sanitary hygiene regulations in Victoria, suggesting, perhaps, that in 1919 the conditions in these places was not yet a major concern to the middle-class.

But the boarding house provisions of the Health Act were aimed, in part, at remedying some of the alleged deficiencies in the 'national stock' that, as we have seen, was of concern to many commentators at the time. Lawson's speech was couched in terms that lend support to those who claim that environmentalism

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid, p. 15.

[53] Victoria, Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 153, p. 1442.

[54] Ibid, pp. 1442 and 1450.

rather than eugenics remained in the ascendancy after the First World War. The major provisions of the Act, according to the Premier, were designed to improve the general health of the community, and to prevent disease. 'We recognise', he said, 'that it is more important to prevent than to cure. If you are to have a healthy and virile people you must give such hygienic conditions and create such an environment as will enable a healthy virile race to develop and flourish'. He went on to argue:

> You must not so much remove sickness and ill-health as remove the causes that contribute to them. You must get down to the root of the whole matter, and provide for sanitary conditions; you must provide better homes and better housing conditions; you must see that the children grow up into strong and healthy citizens.[55]

There was no particular humanitarian sentiment associated with these statements. Rather, they were mostly linked to concerns about national efficiency and the need to improve the 'race'. Lawson argued that these measures were necessary because if

> we are to have the greatest efficiency in citizenship, we must have a physical basis. We must have a strong people physically if they are to effectively discharge all their civic duties. If they are to make this country what it ought to be, the units in the community must be strong, and the citizen must be strong on the physical side.[56]

I would argue that the boarding house regulations were an early attempt to improve housing conditions so as to alleviate some of these alleged problems. The findings of the Royal Commission on housing had suggested that both children and adults were living in poor and cramped conditions in some of the seaside boarding houses and some of the worst of the apartment houses. Their health was affected by these conditions, and so in environmentalist terms, they, by definition, could not become 'strong', 'physical' 'units' of society until their housing situation was improved.

The final version of the Health Act defined a boarding house as one in which five, rather than the original ten, occupants were 'lodged or boarded for hire or reward

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[55] Ibid, p. 1439.
[56] Ibid, p. 1441.

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from week to week or for more than a week'. This was changed at the instigation of the Member for Dandenong, Frank Groves, whose electorate included the seaside resorts of Aspendale, Seaford and Chelsea that had been mentioned adversely in the Royal Commission Report.[57] The Act required boarding house owners to register with local councils who would classify the house, regulate the number of tenants allowed, check the drainage and sanitary condition of the place, ensure its cleanliness, and inspect and ensure there was 'properly constructed situated and ventilated and sufficient in capacity...suitable stores for the keeping and storage of food'. These rules were to come in at 'the expiration of six months from the commencement' of the Act.[58]

In the event the new rules didn't come into effect until 1924. Regulations relating to boarding houses and licensed victuallers' premises were published in the Victorian *Government Gazette* on 21 August 1923, and came into effect the following January.[59] The rules 'divided boarding houses into two classes – A and B'. Class A boarding houses were those that had

> a) an approved septic-tank system or a sewerage system controlled by a sewerage authority; or an approved system for the chemical treatment of sewage;
> b) electric lighting or an approved system of gas lighting;
> c) an adequate supply of hot water for baths...

Class A boarding houses also included those that met with the general approval of the various councils' inspectors. All others were to be rated as Class B.[60] The regulations set out twenty-nine rules in twelve divisions. They insisted that in new boarding houses each bedroom should have sixty square feet for each occupant and that existing boarding houses should have a minimum of fifty-four square feet per occupant. Other regulations related to sanitary provision which included the rule that there should be one bathroom and one toilet for every ten inmates. There

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[57] Groves was not in the House at the time, so the amendment was moved by James Murphy, Member for Port Melbourne, in his absence, Parlt. Debates, Vol. 154, 3 December, 1919, p. 2840.

[58] *Health Act* 1919 , Part X– Boarding Houses, Common Lodging Houses, and Eating Houses, p. 278.

[59] Department of Public Health, Victoria, Commission of Public Health, *Health Act*, 1919, Regulations Relating to Boarding-houses and Licensed Victuallers' Premises, 1923.

was also provision for ventilation, lighting, water supply, and fire 'prevention and extinction', and under 'general sanitary provisions', a rule that no verandah or balcony was to be used 'as a kitchen, or for cooking purposes'.[61]

Flats were specifically excluded from the regulations. A flat was defined as meaning and including 'every self-contained suite of apartments containing living-room, bedroom, bathroom, and sanitary conveniences whether provided with a separate kitchen or not, and whether the inmates take their meals within such apartment rooms, or in a common dining room'.[62] There was, however, some confusion as to whether flats needed to be registered by local councils. The Acting Town Clerk of the City of Melbourne wrote to the Public Health Department arguing that under one interpretation of the Act, 'a building containing a "Flat" may have to be registered'. Owing to some problems with this interpretation, the Council took it upon itself to declare that it would read the rules to 'mean that "Flats" need not be registered'.[63] This exclusion of flats from municipal inspection perhaps suggests that by this time they, rather than boarding houses, were beginning to be seen as the most appropriate place of residence for those members of the middle- and upper-classes who wouldn't or couldn't live in a private house.

The new rules didn't differentiate between city and country or resort area boarding houses.[64] But they did merge apartment houses and boarding houses into one overarching type. This, however, wasn't explicitly spelt out in the Regulations, causing some problems for local councils, whose job it was to enforce them. The Town Clerk of St Kilda, for instance, queried this several times

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[60] Ibid, Division 11 – Classification, p. 7.

[61] Ibid, Division 9 – Fire Prevention and Extinction, p. 5; Division 10 – General Sanitary Provisions, p. 6.

[62] Ibid, Division 1 – Introductory.

[63] Department of Human Services Victoria (hereafter DHSV) Archives, File No. 94/484/1/AR/553 General Health Branch: 'Boarding House Regulations'.

[64] An opinion piece in the *Argus* saw this as unfair, especially in regards to those boarding houses not connected to a public water supply system. It felt the Regulations were a little harsh on those

in the lead up to the promulgation of the Regulations, but was ignored.[65] The final status of these places was only confirmed after the Regulations were in place, when the Town Clerk questioned, on behalf of his Health Committee, whether an apartment house in which no meals were provided, needed to be registered. The Secretary of the Public Health Commission replied in the affirmative, arguing that these places were boarding houses not flats, because flats 'must be self-contained'.[66]

The Regulations and their associated inspections caused problems and uproar amongst boarding house owners and proprietors. In November 1923 the Secretary of the Boarding and Tourist House Employers Association, CA Pullman, wrote to the Secretary of the Public Health Commission complaining about some of the new rules which his organisation regarded as excessively strict. Their concerns mostly related to rules about the provision of bathrooms and toilets, access to natural lighting, and the use of verandahs as sleeping areas .[67] Their major concern, however, was with the rule about the sizes of rooms, which at fifty-four square feet per person per room was regarded as unreasonable. The association put forward a compromise in which the room space for a second person should be ninety square feet, 130 feet for a third, and 160 for four people. Pullman concluded his letter with the warning that 'if the clause re Area of Rooms is not modified the available accommodation will be reduced by at least 30%'. This, he noted, would be 'most serious to the community at such a time when the shortage of houses is so marked'.[68]

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proprietors and called for a certain amount of 'forbearance while the regulations are on their "trial"', *Argus*, 3 October 1923.

[65] City of Port Philip, St Kilda City Council Records, File: 'Registered Boarding Houses'.

[66] Ibid. The debate about whether 'apartment houses' were flats or boarding houses went on for years, with councils and the Public Health Department seeking legal and other opinions well into the post-World War Two period. See DHSV Archives, File No. 94/484/7/AR/570 Part 1, 'Acts, Regulations etc, Health Act Amendments'.

[67] DHSV Archives, File No. 94/484/1/AR/553. Note that this Association covered city and country boarding houses and most of their complaints were to do with rules for sanitation etc in country places. Unless otherwise stated, the following discussion relates only to Melbourne's boarding houses.

[68] Ibid.

At a subsequent meeting with the Health Minister Stanley Argyle, the Association produced figures that suggested that there were approximately 200 boarding houses in metropolitan Melbourne, housing 5000 people. The figures put the yearly takings of these places at 650,000 pounds and the Association argued that the Regulations as they stood would reduce the number of establishments by ten per cent, which would mean a reduction in takings of 65,000 pounds or '325 pounds per annum per establishment'.[69] The government and the Health Commission subsequently reconsidered their position and agreed to 'accept reasonable interpretations' of the rules on room size. They were not, however, prepared to back down on the provisions on bathrooms or natural lighting. The Commission resolved that it would 'be satisfied with reasonable compliance with the Regulations but it is competent for any municipality to enforce the regulations'.[70]

The new rules caused problems and resentment amongst boarding house operators in East Melbourne. An organisation of proprietors there met in May 1925 to protest about council inspections of their properties and the hardships the new rules were causing. The meeting was called to 'form an association for the purpose of securing sane administration of regulations pertaining to Boarding Houses', and to organise a deputation to the 'Health Committee of the Melbourne City Council in connection therewith'.[71] A report in the *Sun* early in May catalogued some of the proprietors' grievances. One related to a

> room measuring 25 ft by 18 ft, and containing seven windows, a fireplace, two ventilators and a door [that had] been condemned by an inspector, because it lacks the exterior ventilators demanded in the regulations.

The proprietors also felt that the inspectors lacked discrimination in their dealings with the public.[72] The following day an editorial in the paper accused the Public

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid

[71] Flier, MCC Files, PROV, VPRS 3183/P2/86/25/2513.

[72] *Sun*, 2 April 1925.

Health Commission of being a little heavy-handed, and suggested it should use more discretion, especially with the smaller proprietors, who were 'mostly women struggling to make a living'.[73]

A deputation of the proprietors visited the Melbourne City Council (MCC) Health Committee on 26 May 1925. They complained that the regulations were 'valueless and heavy in a marked degree in East Melbourne where the conditions are healthy and hygienic and comply with the Health Regulations, perhaps to a greater extent than in any other places'.[74] The deputation was introduced by the local MLA, AA Farthing, who pointed out that the proprietors saw the problems relating to the enforcement of the regulations as coming from inspectors of the state Public Health Department, rather than the Council itself. He nevertheless asked the committee members to 'use your influence to have these regulations modified as far as lies in your power'.[75] The major concern of this group was the problem of the definition of who was responsible for the cost of repairs to boarding houses – the owners or proprietors. Each argued that the cost should be borne by the other. There was also concern relating to the rule that balconies and verandahs were no longer allowed to be used as kitchens or for cooking. This was said to be a serious problem in East Melbourne with its preponderance of 'roomers' – people 'whose business takes them into Melbourne, and who perhaps only have rooms' in the suburb which they mostly used for sleeping. These people ate their main meals in the city, but used gas rings in their boarding houses to make a cup of tea or perhaps cook one meal a day at home for themselves. These gas rings were now banned or required to be moved into bedrooms – a situation described as 'farcical and unhealthy'.[76]

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[73] Ibid, 3 April 1925.

[74] 'Notes of deputation from boarding house and apartment agency proprietors' league, re administration of boarding house regulations', PROV, VPRS 3183/P2/86/25/2513.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid; Note these places would appear to more closely resemble apartment houses or tenements rather than boarding houses.

The proprietors' biggest gripe appears, however, to have been that boarding and apartment houses in East Melbourne, 'a very fine district', were the focus of inspection. They raised concerns that while they were being targeted for inspection, '[t]here are some slum areas in other parts of the City that are being neglected'. The President of the Boarding Houses and Apartment Agency Proprietors' League, Mr Hill, was at pains to point out that he agreed with the concept of the new measures and 'the necessity of preserving the health of the community because it is vital to our nationhood'. What puzzled him and his organisation, however, was why East Melbourne was being targeted for inspection:

> We admit that there are houses that are a disgrace to the community, but we have to learn that they are in East Melbourne. Epidemics in the past have not taken root in it, and all the houses are substantially and faithfully built. We are asking why we are singled out at the commencement of this. We think it would have been a wiser policy to have begun in some of the other areas.

He finished his submission by declaring East Melbourne to be 'what I think must be admitted, if not the best, one of the best suburbs in your city'[77]

The arguments put forward by Hill, Farthing and their group, suggests that boarding house owners and proprietors did not appreciate being classified in the category that traditionally only applied to lodging houses – their accommodation inferiors. Nor did residents of East Melbourne take kindly to being considered in the same breath as the denizens of poorer suburbs across Hoddle Street or Victoria Parade. The *Sun* reported on the outcome of the meeting, but did so in a 'debate' format, with the proprietors 'Rigorous!' claims in one column, and the Public Health Committee's 'Not True' rebuttal opposite.[78] Partly in response to the publicity generated, and after the complaints of the East Melbourne proprietors got as far as the by-then Chief Secretary, Stanley Argyle, it was announced that the regulations would be altered to become less proscriptive. The *Argus* reported

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[77] Ibid. The decision to inspect East Melbourne's boarding houses was, according to a memo in the MCC Health Committee's files, simply part of a policy to enforce the Boarding House Regulations 'as expeditiously as possible', 'Memo: Deputation to Health Committee 26.5.25 – re Boarding Houses, East Melbourne', Ibid.

that Argyle had agreed that the 'views of the deputation would be placed before the Health Commission', and that in his opinion the 'regulations should be administered with a certain amount of discretion'.[79]

The new rules came into effect in 1926 and specified that each room should be a minimum of 500 cubic feet for every inmate, and 'not less than 60 square feet of floor area, for every inmate accommodated in any bedroom or sleeping apartment'.[80] The classes A and B were maintained, but extended to include services as well as appointments. Council inspectors were now able to include standards of 'equipment, accommodation, sanitary fittings, service of meals, and management', as well as 'geographical position', in their decision to grant 'Class A' status to a particular house. As with the earlier regulations, it remained an offence to claim Class A status when that grading had not been granted by the council.[81] The major change from the 1923 regulations, however, was the inclusion of a rule that proprietors were required to 'provide a common room to which boarders or lodgers shall have at all hours unrestricted access'.[82] This provision attempted to correct the concern that religious commentators were voicing about boarding houses not having anywhere for residents to meet and socialise on the premises, thus forcing them to either remain alone in their rooms, or meet friends in unsupervised public places, with the moral dangers considered inherent in such practices.[83]

The 1928 *Health Act*

In 1928 the Government further amended the Health Act, including the provisions relating to boarding houses. The new regulations were far more restrictive than

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[78] *Sun*, 27 May 1925.

[79] *Argus*, 2 June 1925.

[80] Department of Public Health, Victoria, Commission of Public Health, *Health Act*, 1919, Regulations Relating to Boarding-houses and Licensed Victuallers' Premises, 1926, Part II, Division 1 – Accommodation.

[81] Ibid, Part IV – Classification of Boarding Houses.

[82] Ibid, Part II, Division 11– General Sanitary Provisions.

those of 1923 and 1926, and included a rule that proprietors must keep a register of all tenants, their usual address, date of arrival, and date of departure.[84] The major change in relation to the actual boarding houses themselves was that the minimum size of a room was increased to 'not less than 600 cubic feet of space and not less than 60 square feet of floor area' for tenants over ten years of age and half that area for those under ten. A double room was to be a minimum of 850 cubic feet. These measurements, along with the room's number, were to be posted on the door of each bedroom for perusal by tenants and inspectors. Unlike previously no allowance appears to have been made for already existing boarding houses that did not meet these requirements.[85]

Rules, such as those to do with cleanliness and general upkeep of the premises that had previously only applied to common lodging houses, were also applied to boarding houses under the new regulations.[86] These now also specifically set out what furniture and bedding a boarding house proprietor was required to provide for his or her tenants. One provision required each bedroom to be furnished 'with such bedsteads, bedding, and necessary utensils as may be sufficient for the requirements of the persons accommodated therein'.[87] Proprietors were also required to 'cause the floors of all common rooms, sleeping apartments, passages, and stairs to be swept and cleansed daily', as well as to ensure that all 'sheets and pillowslips' should be kept reasonably clean and not allowed to be used for 'more than seven nights without being washed'. Sheets and pillowslips were also required to be washed before being used by a new boarder.[88] Another change banned bedrooms from 'opening off a kitchen or other rooms place where food is cooked, prepared or served'.[89]

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[83] See Agnes Murphy, *Women's Social* Work, October 1921, quoted above.

[84] Victorian Statutory Rules, 1930.

[85] Ibid, Part 2 Division 1– Accommodation.

[86] 1926, Part III, Division 1 – Cleanliness

[87] 1930, Part II Division 1 – Accommodation.

[88] Ibid, Part 2 Division 11 – General Sanitary Provisions.

[89] Ibid, Part II Division 1 – Accommodation.

Several small amendments were made to these rules in 1931 after the Guest and Boarding House Association – the successor organisation to the Boarding House and Tourist Employers' Association – complained about some of the provisions. A memorandum from the Secretary of the Public Health Department in 1931 advised local councils that in future the notice setting out the size of each room was to be replaced by one stating the number of beds permitted in the room. Councils were also advised that bedrooms would be allowed to lead directly off a dining room, provided that no food preparation occurred there. There was also a change to fire extinction rules which made boarding houses in operation prior to December 1926 subject to rules requiring them to have internal fire taps and hoses installed.[90]

In the main, however, the Regulations as gazetted in 1930 stood. What these new regulations did, in effect, was to improve the standards of accommodation in boarding houses and regulate the comings and goings of tenants, in much the same way as was standard practice with lodging house tenants. That many of the prohibitory rules now enforced for boarding houses had previously only applied to common lodging houses, suggests that in the eyes of lawmakers at least, the status of the two was beginning to merge. The government's insistence on these new rules for boarding houses suggests three things. The first is that the new rules were egalitarian and aimed at improving the living conditions of the residents of these places. The second, and perhaps more likely, is that standards were slipping as the more affluent began to move to flats and small houses, and boarding houses gradually became less luxurious and less profitable for their owners and/or proprietors. As in the USA and Canada proprietors reacted by reducing standards and withdrawing from the provision of meals. The social and economic profile of these places consequently declined leading to government intervention in their operation.[91] The third explanation is that these changes were a reaction to the increased concerns that standards of behaviour of residents in the latter were beginning to resemble those in the former and therefore in the interests of the

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[90] DHSV Archives, File No. 94/484/1/AR/553.

[91] See Chapter Two above.

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community's moral and physical health, these places need to be more closely supervised. Also, if we accept Lenore Davidoff's argument that government intrusion into the private sphere usually only applies to the lower-classes, then we can suggest that by definition the imposition of these new rules confirms the decline of the status of boarding houses.[92]

This argument is given further credence by the decision to redefine flats in the new Act. The definition of what constituted a boarding house remained largely the same, but a 'flat' was altered to mean

> a suite of rooms, being a portion or portions of a building and forming complete residence, including bath-room and sanitary conveniences, under the exclusive control of the occupier.[93]

Debates on the Health Bill raised the concern that flat-dwellers would be subject to inspection and control. In introducing the Bill to the Legislative Assembly in October 1928 the responsible minister, John Cain, stressed that the government was not seeking to interfere with flat dwellers. He argued that the new rules aimed to differentiate between boarding houses and flats which were on the increase in inner Melbourne. Several municipalities, Cain said, had had 'some difficulty...in interpreting the sections that deal with the registration of boarding houses', and wished to clarify the differences between flats and boarding houses. One of those councils experiencing difficulties was – as we have seen – the City of Melbourne. Cain also stressed that the Government had no plan 'to compel the registration of flats, but an effort is made to give a clear definition of what a residential flat is'.

He was reacting to questions raised by the conservative opposition at the initial definition of flats in the Bill, which saw them as 'a complete residence with a separate entrance not necessarily from the street'.[94] In early September HH Smith, one of the two members for Melbourne Province raised concern in the Legislative Council that Cliveden Mansions in East Melbourne, with its middle- and upper-

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[92] L. Davidoff, 'Separation'.

[93] Victorian Statutory Rules 1930, Part 1 Division 2 – Interpretation.

[94] Victoria, Parliamentary Debates, Assembly, Vol. 177, 9 October 1928, p. 2098.

class clientele, could be subject to inspection under the Act because flats there 'did not have separate entrances'. Similar questions were also raised early in the debates by Harold Cohen, the other member for Melbourne Province, who was perhaps reflecting the concerns of upper-middle-class flat-dwellers like his parents who lived at Melbourne Mansions in Collins Street.[95] In the Regulations adopted in 1930, this definition was removed, perhaps in deference to these sensibilities. What these concerns suggest is that by the late 1920s, as some influential sections of the middle-class moved into these luxurious mansion flats, these came to be seen as off-limits to governmental reform and interference. Boarding houses, whose tenants were increasingly poorer and more transient members of society, became subject to much more of this control and supervision.

The *Age* welcomed the move to control boarding houses and the stricter definition of what was a flat. One of their writers suggested that the new rules meant that 'many so-called flats which are really "rooms" in a house may in future be regarded as boarding houses, since in some premises there are several families living in "flats" in the same house, but all sharing the same bathroom and other conveniences'. 'Some premises', he went on, 'are rather overcrowded in this way'.[96] The writer was concerned that these places were passing as flats and thus perhaps undermining the status of the latter, which were increasingly becoming popular with some members of the middle- and upper-classes. Included in this group were some members of his employers' family, the Symes, who owned the *Age* newspaper and were the owners and some of the occupiers of Melbourne Mansions.[97]

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[95] Ibid, Council, 4 September 1928, p. 1297. On Cohen's parents living at Melbourne Mansions see Barbara Falk, 'The unpayable debt', in P. Grimshaw and L. Strahan (eds), *The Half-Open Door: Sixteen modern Australian women look at professional life and achievement*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1984, (First published 1982), p. 12.

[96] *Age*, 18 September 1930.

[97] Oswald Syme lived at Melbourne Mansions in 1940 and the block was listed in the Melbourne City Council Rate Books as being owned by the 'Executors of the Will of David Syme'. See MCC *Rate Books*, 1940/1, La Trobe Ward, PROV, VPRS 5708 Unit 83.

The final major pre-World War Two change to boarding house regulations came on the eve of war in August 1939.[98] The changes were quite minimal and essentially related to sanitary provisions and upkeep of the premises. The tone of the changes reflect some of the concerns of the Housing Investigation and Slum Abolition Board (HISAB) report of 1937, which had expressed disquiet about apartment houses and delicensed hotels that 'are invariably used as low-grade apartment houses' in 'decadent' areas. These places were said to quickly become overcrowded and dilapidated.[99] The HISAB Report's documentation of these places reflected the problems they faced as inner suburban residents attempted to deal with the ravages of the Depression and its aftermath. Inner city boarding and lodging houses, like most of their neighbouring single family houses, fell into disrepair as owners wouldn't or couldn't afford to spend the money necessary for their upkeep. Many of the new regulations related to hygiene and the control of vermin, which again, were issues that had been of concern to the HISAB.[100] The new 'General Sanitary Provisions' dealt with rats and mice, and banned dogs from bedrooms and food storage and preparation areas.[101] Changes were also made to rules for the preparation and storage of food. Proprietors were required to keep food free 'from contamination, in accordance with the requirements of any regulations made in respect of food for sale'. Food preparation areas and dining-rooms were also required to be kept fly-proof.[102]

Further changes were also made to the regulations relating to bedding and manchester. Blankets on beds for anyone aged over ten were required to be at

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[98] Victorian Statutory Rules 1939, &C. *Health Act – Regulations* Health Act 1928. Regulations Relating to Boardinghouses, Common Lodginghouses, and Licensed Victuallers' Premises, August 1939; A small change to the regulations was made under the Commonwealth National Security Regulations during the war. These repealed some of the regulations relating to fire escapes and fire prevention. See Victorian Statutory Rules 1942, & C. *Commonwealth National Security (Supplementary) Regulations – Order*. Health Acts. Amending Regulations – Boarding and Lodging Houses.

[99] Housing Investigation and Slum Abolition Board, *Slum Reclamation: Housing for the Lower Paid Worker*, First (Progress) Report, Melbourne, 1937, p. 10.

[100] Ibid, Paragraphs 18–21.

[101] 1939, Part II, Division 11 – General Sanitary Provisions Paragraphs 13 and 14.

[102] Ibid, Paragraph 7.

least eighty-one inches, while sheets had to be at least ninety-nine inches in length.[103] The rules on cleanliness of manchester were also tightened to include towels, which like sheets and pillowslips, were now required to be cleaned weekly and/or after each tenant vacated a room. This rule, it would appear, was a reaction to concerns about the spread of diseases through the use of the 'common towel' in boarding houses and other public places such as theatres and halls.[104] The regulations also included a precise rule on how beds were to be made, that required 'the upper sheet of every furnished bed to be placed in such a manner that the upper sheet is folded down over the outer surface of the blanket or blankets to the extent of at least 18 inches measured from the upper edge of the blanket or blankets'.[105] Beds, in other words, were to be made like those in hospitals and other public and private institutions.

This rule and the provision that beds should be made every day caused a journalist at the *Argus* to suggest that the regulations were intrusive and crossed the boundary of the sanctity of the private home. In the slightly mocking tone usually used by journalists when referring to any 'female' or 'domestic' issue, he or she suggested that 'making beds will no longer be a simple matter of domestic routine', but a 'matter of precision and foot rules, because the State has stepped in and government by regulation has been extended to the domiciles of tens of thousands of Victorians'. It was implied that these rules would apply to private houses in which 'paying guests, or lodgers, or boarders' were taken in 'to balance the family budget'.[106] This interpretation was wrong as the new regulations, like those in the earlier periods, applied only to registered boarding and lodging houses that fitted the definition of each of these. In the case of boarding houses, only those with five or more guests besides the proprietor's family were included. The writer actually admitted this in the next paragraph, but the fact that he or she

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[103] Ibid, Part II, Division 1 – Accommodation.

[104] A report in the *Argus* as early as 1925 had voiced the concerns of Dr TW Sinclair, the Health Officer of the MCC at the use of the 'common towel' in boarding houses. These, he said, were 'likely to prove an agent for the spread of epidemic diseases', *Argus*, 29 April 1925.

[105] 1939, Part II, Division 11 – General Sanitary Provisions, paragraph 11.

[106] *Argus*, 8 August 1939.

was prepared to suggest that private homes with one or two boarders or lodgers were included in the rules suggests the power of the idea of the ideology of the private sphere still held sway in the late 1930s. It also perhaps suggests that any rules for boarding houses and their tenants were okay, but the private home – be it a flat or a house – should remain off-limits to government interference or control.

Conclusion

In the interwar years boarding houses lost much of their status and became associated in the eyes of the public, and increasingly the law, with squalor, vice and disease. As they were abandoned by the well-to-do, so too did they come under the control of the public health authorities, who were no longer convinced of the validity of the traditional differentiation between boarding houses and their accommodation inferiors – common lodging houses. By the time of the Second World War there was little in the way of legal separation between these two accommodation sectors. From 1928, boarding house tenants were required to be registered and their comings and goings subject to the same scrutiny as had traditionally been applied to the more transient dwellers of hotels or lodging houses. Increasingly as the 1920s and 1930s progressed it was flats, rather than boarding houses, that came to be seen as the most suitable place of accommodation for those who didn't wish to reside in family accommodation.

There was, however, one major exception to this rule. For unsupervised young women alone in the city because work or study forced them from the family home, flats were not considered appropriate places of accommodation. These women were regarded as under threat in boarding houses, and likely to be subjected to, or witnesses of, unpleasant and/or immoral behaviour. They were also increasingly seen as under threat from unscrupulous men who were said to congregate in these places in order to prey on them. From the end of the First World War, boarding houses began to be portrayed in the religious and secular press as dangerous and unacceptable places for these women. But flats were also unacceptable because they were unsupervised and offered too much freedom.

Flats were also potentially dangerous because they didn't offer a ready-made core of suitable companions. The solution to the problem of accommodating these women, therefore became the religious-based hostel catering solely to women. The next chapter will explore the reasons behind the foundation of a series of these hostels in inner Melbourne from the war years onward.

Chapter Five

Melbourne's Interwar Hostels for 'Business Girls'

Introduction

As boarding houses began to fall into disrepute in the First World War years and beyond, religious and other commentators began to wonder whether they were appropriate homes for young people newly arriving in the city for work. There was special concern about young women discussed in the previous chapter, who were arriving in Melbourne in increasing numbers to take up the new 'pink collar' and manufacturing jobs then becoming available. The solution to the perceived needs of these young women was the establishment of a series of hostels – usually religious-based, and demarcated on denominational lines, although several claimed to not discriminate on the basis of religious affiliation.[1] The YWCA, the Church of England (Anglican Church) Girls' Friendly Society and the Salvation Army had provided shelter to women in Melbourne from the late nineteenth century, but all opened new, larger hostels for 'business girls' in the teens and early 1920s.[2] The Catholic Church established a small place in Fitzroy in 1917 and a larger one in a former coffee palace in Carlton in 1929. The Presbyterian Church opened a hostel for business women on the site of the Old Scotch College

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[1] The PGH was non-denominational but an early decision of its organising committee, declared that 'the principle of the Hostel was that Presbyterians should be given preference in admission to the Hostel'. Presbyterian Church Victoria (PCV), 'Presbyterian Girls Hostel Minutes (Chalmers Hall) 15.12.26 – 16.10.47', Presbyterian Church Archives, Assembly Hall, Collins Street, Melbourne, Minutes, 15 December 1926.

[2] The YWCA opened its first formal hostel in Russell Street in 1913. Before this time it had operated a small hotel-cum-hostel out of its headquarters in Spring Street. See L. Durrant, *YWCA 1882–1982: Melbourne Pictorial History*, YWCA, Melbourne, 1982, and David Maunders, 'Youth Organisations and the Education of Young Women: Reality and Rhetoric. The Melbourne YWCA to 1945', Paper presented at the ANZHES '88 Conference, 27 August 1988, p. 4; The Salvation Army opened its first shelter for women in Exhibition Street in 1897. It also ran other shelters for women in distress in the early twentieth century. In 1905 it opened its first accommodation aimed at more middleclass women when its small 'Woman's Hotel' in Swanston Street opposite the Public Library and Museum opened. See The Salvation Army, Australian Southern Territory, *Melbourne's Salvation Army Heritage*, Salvation Army, Melbourne, 1996, pp. 23–25; GFS of Victoria, *Annual Report*, 1913–14.

in East Melbourne in 1926, while the Wesley Central Mission set up the Princess Mary Club in Lonsdale Street in the city in the same year. Most of the hostels were aimed at women in their late teens and early twenties, with some having an upper age limit, and controls on the amount of time boarders were allowed to remain in residence.

What these hostels attempted to do was establish an acceptable type of accommodation for young women who were deemed incapable of providing for their own real needs, either because they were thought to be naive and gullible, or were too low-paid to afford decent alternative options. The hostels also had a fortunate side-effect for the churches by keeping adherents both within the Christian faith and the particular version of it that each hostel represented. Hugh Jackson has written of the problems the Congregationalist Church experienced in holding onto its members as they moved around Melbourne and Victoria in the late nineteenth century. As Congregationalists moved they lost their affiliation to the church, and in some cases with the faith altogether.[3] In the interwar years, the hostels helped to avoid this by ensuring that young women lived in a religious environment, often in proximity to a church, which they were expected to attend, and in some cases, serve.[4]

The other potential danger the hostels helped overcome was of young women 'marrying out' of their religion because their courting was not suitably supervised and chaperoned. This became a particular issue after 1908 when the Vatican's *Ne Temere* encyclical ruled that the Church would no longer recognise marriages between Catholics and Protestants performed in non-Catholic ceremonies. As a result of this encyclical, religious conversions in order to marry became more common in the 1920s. In his study of sectarianism in Australia, Michael Hogan

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[3] H. Jackson, 'Moving house and changing churches: the case of the Melbourne Congregationalists', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 74, April 1980, pp. 74–85.

[4] Renate Howe and Shurlee Swain quote a Princess Mary Club (PMC) circular of the early 1960s, pointing out to residents that they were expected to regularly attend Sunday services and involve themselves in the activities of the Church. See R. Howe and S. Swain, *The Challenge of the City: The Centenary History of the Wesley Central Mission 1893–1993*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1993, p. 131.

argues that the interwar years witnessed an increase in tensions between Catholics and Protestants, with the question of 'mixed marriages' proving particularly troublesome.[5] 'For many [Protestant] families', he writes, 'the idea of a son or daughter marrying a Catholic was a matter of great anxiety. For Catholics, this family suspicion was reciprocated'.[6] The hostels, therefore, played a significant role in increasing the supervision of girls and promoting religious devotion, as well as increasing the opportunities for boarders to meet young men of their own religion and thus stay within their own church into adulthood.

'Organized Homes' and Accommodation Options for Women Overseas

The concern about the living conditions of young middle-class working women was not confined to Melbourne or Australia. In 1900 the 'Women's Realm' section of the *Argus* commented on a large study of the needs of unattached 'educated' and 'working' females living in British cities. The paper reported that the Women's Industrial Council, was 'setting energetically to work to find out "all about"' the problems faced by these women, by issuing questionnaires asking them what they wanted and needed in accommodation.[7] The results showed that single women wanted to live in 'residential chambers', similar to those being built for single men and couples in the West End of London at that time.[8] The *Argus'* 'Woman's Realm' disagreed, arguing that the best solution to these womens' needs was not these sorts of places, which could easily come to be seen as 'feminine barracks', but a continuation of the YWCA's policy of providing good, cheap boarding houses, where girls could also get 'a really substantial meat meal for a few pence'.

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[5] M. Hogan, *The Sectarian Strand: Religion in Australian History*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1987, esp. Chs. 7 and 8.

[6] Ibid, p. 194. One of the best descriptions of the issues and tensions involved in a 'mixed marriage' during this time is Enid Lyons' description of her conversion and marriage in Tasmania in 1915. See E. Lyons, *So We Take Comfort*, Heinemann, London, 1965, esp. Chapter IX, 'Conversion'.

[7] *Argus*, 10 February 1900.

[8] The whole study was reported by Emily Hobhouse as 'Women Workers: How They Live, How, They Wish To Live', *Nineteenth Century*, March 1900, pp. 471–484.

The *Argus'* editor disagreed, believing that such single-sex places were unnatural, and that if some women were forced to earn their living independently, then they would have to mix with men in the workplace, so why not in the community? 'Neither sex is benefited by segregation', he argued, citing the family where brothers and sisters lived together under one roof, as evidence of 'nature illustrat[ing] the right policy' in this matter. He also felt that even though lodgings would 'never be homes, because no group of lodgers is a family', it was 'flying in the face of nature to make lodgings as unlike a home as possible'. The solution, he felt, was ample provision of chambers in which hard-worked, intelligent, and respectable persons may live comfortably, undivided by sex, and unharassed by petty rules'.[9] The focus of this study was, of course, London, but the editor made no comment on whether these places were to be appropriate only for the metropolis, or for Australian cities as well. We can only assume that the latter was the case.

Joanne Meyerowitz's study of young female students and workers in Chicago refers to the supervised hostels set up there as 'organized homes' or 'organized boarding homes'.[10] In America, most had a religious basis, but some were secular. They were set up there long before they arrived in Australia in any major form, being a feature of Chicago from the 1870s. Their early arrival in Chicago reflects both the maturity of the American economy in the nineteenth century and, consequently that the drift to the city occurred earlier there.[11] Meyerowitz argues that while much of the attention of historians of late nineteenth and early twentieth century women has focussed on the 'New Women' – middle- and upper-class professional women and those who 'experimented with bohemian lifestyles, and demanded a voice in the political sphere', very little has been written on the much larger group of working women who moved 'beyond traditional domesticity [and]

[9] *Argus*, 14 April 1900. Thanks to Katie Holmes for these sources.
[10] J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*.
[11] On the 'drift to the city' in America see also P. Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order*, passim.

entered the public sphere quietly to work for low pay as wage laborers'.[12] In most cases their time 'adrift' was fairly short-lived, often only 'for a few months or years before they married', but for others it became a more permanent way of life and lasted 'for all or most of their adult lives'.

In America concerns were increasingly expressed about these women 'adrift' from their families in the period from the 1880s to the early 1930s. Olivier Zunz reports that organisations designed to find work for women coming to the city from rural areas and overseas were first established in the 1830s, but later in the century they began to operate as 'reform societies to aid working women' deemed to be in moral and physical danger in the rapidly expanding cities.[13] David Pivar's work on America's 'purity crusade' of the late nineteenth century identifies a concern on the part of the middle- and upper-classes with protecting female workers separated from the 'close kinship ties of the of a pre-industrial era', and the 'restraints of the small town'.[14] He goes on to suggest, however, that this concern with welfare and the desire to create a place of refuge, as provided by organisations such as the YWCA and Girls Friendly Societies (GFS), was coupled with a desire for social control 'aimed at finding substitutes for the low entertainments and corrupting influences of urban life', which were regarded as direct paths toward prostitution.[15]

Meyerowitz agrees, arguing that in the middle years of nineteenth century and up to about 1920 these young women were popularly regarded as 'victims' of a cruel economic system, but by the 1920s the image of the 'women adrift' had changed and they came to be portrayed in the popular media as 'sexual objects' openly parading their sexuality, threatening the model of traditional family and gender

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[12] J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, p. xvii.

[13] O. Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality*, pp. 63–4

[14] D. Pivar, *Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality and Social Control, 1868–1900*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1973, p. 105.

[15] Ibid.

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roles.[16] By then they were no longer victims, but striking evidence of the decline of morality and traditional values. The 'organized homes' were set up by charitable and philanthropic institutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to counter the temptations and activities isolated young women supposedly faced under the influence of the values of the big city.[17] Meyerowitz argues that these more organised institutions attempted to create 'homes away from home' by providing 'women superintendents who were expected to mother residents as well as manage business'.[18] The managers were expected to provide advice, but if necessary also act as moral watchdogs to any of their wayward or easily-led charges. The organised homes attempted to overcome problems of loneliness and isolation by providing communal meeting areas where boarders could meet each other, as well as entertain female and male friends.

Nutritious and decent, if none-too-exciting meals were also provided for the tenants, who no longer had to cook for themselves on a gas ring in their own room, or rely on the cheap meals provided in cafes in rooming house districts. Residents were not only safe from any of the risks associated with the city, but were also able to form networks to provide help in times of need, as well as the sharing of information about job openings and such. Meyerowitz argues that many 'formed social and economic relationships in the city to substitute for the support and companionship of family'. Managers 'encouraged sisterly social bonds among the residents', by organising get togethers, parties and social evenings. There were two motives for this. The first was to keep the boarders happy and provide these social networks for them. The second was a means of control, that sought to 'restrain female sexual behaviour by offering women a homelike alternative to the unsupervised world of the restaurant and the dance hall'.[19]

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[16] J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, p. xxiii.

[17] The best known American fictional study of the dangers faced by innocent females arriving in the city is Theodore Dreiser's, *Sister Carrie*, OUP, London, 1965 (First published in Chicago in 1900).

[18] J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, p. 79.

[19] Ibid, p. 80–1; For a localised study of the YWCA's activities in America see Sarah Heath, 'Negotiating White Womanhood: The Cincinnatti YWCA and White Wage-Earning Women,

In England Martha Vicinus has referred to these places as 'model housing and clubs for women'.[20] As with Chicago, they were established in Britain in the late nineteenth century, and like those across the Atlantic, saw their role as creating communities for working and other independent women who might otherwise be isolated in the city. They were not meant to act as surrogate families, 'but they would be potential communities offering protection, convenience, and opportunities for a fuller social life'.[21] Some were set up by private companies, along the lines of the 'philanthropy and five per cent' model, but the majority 'were small boardinghouses (sic) taken over by philanthropic' organizations and run on a not-for-profit basis.[22] Again, food that was reasonably good and wholesome was a feature of these places, as was the companionship of a common dining-room and lounge room. Vicinus argues that many people were critical of these places because of their strict rules and class-based nature, but believes 'they did meet a need for independent working women who lacked social contacts or did not work in an institution or needed an inexpensive pied-a-terre in London'.[23]

1918–1929', in N. Mjagkij and M. Spratt (eds), *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*, New York University Press, New York and London, 1997, pp. 86–110; Paul Groth is not so sympathetic to these types of places and argues that 'the managers of nonprofit lodgings often imposed curfews, lectured the tenants on morals, tightly enforced house rules, and required tenants to pay for meals whether they ate them or not'. Not surprisingly he suggests most tenants moved out as soon as they could, and found accommodation in the premises of 'commercial entrepreneurs [who] ventured successfully into the same market'. See P. Groth, *Living Downtown*, p. 103; Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago also had a wing devoted to providing hostellike accommodation for middleclass single women. Dolores Hayden has described this and similar places as solving the 'the logistical problems of spinsterhood, by providing a respectable, adult home life, autonomous yet collective'. See D. Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, p. 174. Thanks to Anne Gartner for this reference.

[20] M. Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850–1920*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1985, Appendix B, 'Model Housing and Clubs for Women'.

[21] Ibid, p. 295.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid, p. 298.

EM Clowes wrote of the prewar accommodation options available for young middle-class women in Melbourne in her autobiographical *On the Wallaby Through Victoria*, published in 1911. These options were fairly limited. She described the large non-denominational halls of residence in the city centre as 'Chambers' and suggested that they consisted of rooms of 'all prices, all sizes, all degrees of comfort or dinginess'.[24] Rooms were available to men and women, although the majority of the tenants in the less expensive of these places were 'working or business girls', usually 'telephone-girls, typewriting-girls, shop girls, tea-room girls, University students, art students, dressmakers, and milliners'.[25] Their rooms were essentially bedsits, each equipped with a small primus stove as the only means of cooking. Each floor contained one bathroom, which was used by all tenants – males on one floor and females on the other. Clowes argued that the majority of the tenants were hard-working people who preferred them to boarding houses because they offered privacy and freedom from sometimes overbearing landladies. Most of the chambers had a good name, although she did suggest that one or two were sullied by their reputations as the abode of some of Melbourne's 'gayer damsels'. It was this reputation that led in part to the push for the establishment of the more supervised religious-based hostels.

At about the same time as Clowes was writing, the new General Secretary of the Australian YWCA, Amy Snelson, arrived from Britain and was shocked to find Melbourne had no proper Association hostel for young women. She wrote to the *Argus* in April 1912 expressing her disappointment and concern that the city had 'inadequate and unsuitable association buildings', and no hostel provision for 'girl students, business girls [or] girl travellers'.[26] Her solution to this problem was a public appeal for funds to raise money for a new YWCA headquarters and hostel. The money was raised in around twelve months and a new building erected in

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[24] E. Clowes, *On the Wallaby*, p. 118.
[25] Ibid, p. 120.

Russell Street in the City. The money for the site and furnishings was raised from the public, while the building itself was funded by members of the softgood manufacturing Connibere family in memory of their father, George.[27] The building was opened in December 1913 by the wife of the Governor General, Lady Denman, who described it as a 'splendid thing' for those women who increasingly had to work outside the home, to have 'the opportunity of enjoying the advantages of home life under the roof of the YWCA'.[28]

The Church of England also opened a new Girls' Friendly Society (GFS) Lodge in 1913 (Illustration 13). Ruth Teale's small study of Anglican women in Australia argues that the GFS was established in England in the 1870s out of the 'concern of its founders with what was termed "social purity"'. One of its stated aims was to 'encourage purity of life, dutifulness to parents, faithfulness to employers, temperance, and thrift'.[29] It also operated a system whereby unchaperoned young women would be met and protected as they travelled nationally and internationally in search of work, or to take up positions already promised.[30] The GFS came to Victoria in 1883, and opened a small club for immigrants and female travellers in Russell Street in the City two years later.[31] In the years up to 1913 these premises were coming to be considered too small for modern needs, and an appeal to buy a new hostel was established under the auspices of the Archbishop,

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[26] *Argus*, 10 April 1912.

[27] M. Dunn, *The Dauntless Bunch: The Story of the YWCA in Australia*, YWCA, Melbourne, 1991, p. 46; *Argus*, 15 December 1913; P. de Serville, 'Connibere, Sir Charles Wellington (1864–1941)', *ADB*, Vol. 8, Cl–Gib, MUP, Melbourne, 1981, pp. 88–9.

[28] Ibid.

[29] R. Teale, 'Matron, Maid and Missionary: The World of Anglican Women in Australia', in S. Willis (ed), *Women, Faith and Fetes: Essays in the History of Women and the Church in Australia*, Dove Communications, Melbourne, 1977, p. 124.

[30] No history of the Australian branch of the GFS exists, although Jan Gothard has looked at the role it played in the reception and care of female immigrants in Australia from the 1880s. See J. Gothard, 'A Compromise with Conscience: The Reception of Female Immigrant Domestic Servants in Eastern Australia 1860–1890', *Labour History*, No. 62, May 1992, pp. 38–51; For a history of the British parent organisation see Brian Harrison, 'For Church, Queen and Family: The Girls' Friendly Society 1874–1920', *Past and Present*, Number 61, November 1973, pp. 107–138; Sabine Willis has looked at the Mothers' Union of the Anglican Church, which is essentially the GFS equivalent for married women. See S. Willis, 'Homes are Divine Workshops'.

[31] GFS of Victoria, *Annual Report*, 1885, 1886.

Lowther Clarke. The role of the new lodge was to continue the GFS's traditional work with immigrants, but was also designed to extend shelter to unaccompanied girls working in the new jobs becoming available in the city.[32] The establishment of a new hostel was described by the Dean of Melbourne, Reverend R. Stephen as a means for young women to avoid 'a great deal of the loneliness which, if not checked, might lead them into unpleasantness and dangerous society'. He told a meeting called to discuss the need for a new hostel, that many of the girls seeking accommodation with the GFS were immigrants from overseas, and found in the current lodge 'a temporary home, a good friend and sound advice' in their new city. Others were country girls who came 'into the city from a country home, either to go into service or to take up some kindred work'.[33]

In order to keep up with this demand it was decided to buy the former YWCA building in Spring Street and renovate it suit to GFS needs. The Church set up an appeal, supported by Archbishop Lowther Clarke, who called on Anglicans to donate money so that the GFS could continue to do 'good work among girls of the city, in sheltering and protecting them from dangers'.[34] A large advertisement in the Church of England *Messenger* in October 1913 showed a picture of the new hostel with the caption:

> For the Upholding of Womanhood. The Church has purchased, for £5,000, this Building. Trusting to the Liberality of the Church People to Subscribe this Sum. Is that Trust going to be Betrayed?[35]

The money was quickly raised and the new lodge was opened in March 1914 by Lady Denman, who wished it every success in its work, which 'she hoped would be even wider in scope in the future than it had in the past'.[36]

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[32] Ibid, 1911–12.

[33] Church of England *Messenger*, 1 August 1913.

[34] *Argus*, 20 October 1913.

[35] *Messenger*, 24 October 1913.

[36] *Argus*, 13 March 1914. Interestingly, the opening of the Lodge was not mentioned in the *Messenger*.

The lodge catered for about two dozen-or-so women – making it smaller than the YWCA and the later hostels opened by other churches and religious bodies. In the early-to-mid 1920s, it averaged around twenty boarders at any one time, although this would obviously fluctuate depending on the time of year.[37] The lodge was also used as the headquarters of the GFS and was available for hire as a venue for Anglican groups. In 1924 board and lodging ranged from twenty-two and sixpence per week for a GFS member in a three or four bed dormitory to thirty shillings for a non-member in a single or balcony room, overlooking the Treasury Gardens opposite. Meals cost from one and threepence for breakfast, to two shillings for dinner. Bed and breakfast was available to casuals at four and sixpence. Boarders were also able to use laundry facilities, which cost twopence per hour for the copper and the same for use of an electric iron. A hot bath could also be had for twopence.[38] Lodge rules stipulated that girls over twenty-five years of age could not remain in residence for longer than two years so that younger girls newly arriving in the city would be able to be accommodated, although this rule was changed as the lodge lost popularity as other hostels opened around the city in the 1920s.[39]

Throughout the interwar years, religious and other commentators came to be particularly concerned about the perceived dangers and discomforts faced by young working women living in boarding houses and some of the 'chambers' described by Clowes. Like the YWCA and the Anglican Church, members of the Catholic Church saw the solution to these problems in the creation of a hostel for business girls, run under the auspices of the Catholic Women's Social Guild (CWSG). Their hostel was established in Gore Street, Fitzroy in early 1917, and offered, for fifteen shillings a week, board and lodging for up to twenty women.[40]

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[37] GFS Central Lodge Committee Minutes, Matron's Reports, 1923–1926. A new larger hostel was built on the same site in the 1930s. GFS Central Lodge, File: Renovations to Central Lodge 1934.

[38] Matron's Report, Minutes 18 January 1924.

[39] Matron's Report, Minutes 18 February 1927.

[40] A Catholic Women's Club existed in Bourke Street in the City before this, but it appears to have been a place for shortterm stays only. Later there was also a small place in Albert Street, East Melbourne. See *Horizon*, September 1924.

The opening of the hostel was announced in the Catholic *Advocate* in March of that year as 'but the first, it is hoped, of many such hostels in Melbourne'.[41] In May, a writer in the same newspaper argued that the hostel was filling a long felt need 'to provide for the many Catholic girls who are employed in Melbourne'. These girls, he argued had previously been 'compelled either to seek lodgings where they can find them, with the dangers involved in so doing, or to lodge at one of the non-Catholic homes which cater for this class of girls'. The hostel was described as 'a start...towards remedying this state of affairs.'[42]

The CWSG used its journal, *Women's Social Work*, to promote the hostel throughout the interwar years, usually by frightening readers with stories about the dangers of city life. A fictional story in 1922, for instance, told of the plight of Nellie, a young woman who arrived at Spencer Street Station from a small country town, looking for work after her father's death had forced hard times on her family. Luckily she met Mary, an old friend from home, who advised her of the existence of the Catholic Hostel. The story set out all the dangers facing young women alone in the city, while simultaneously extolling the benefits of the Catholic Hostel, and calling for more effort to be made by Catholics to both support it financially and more widely advertise its existence among parishioners. The city was presented as an exciting, but potentially dangerous place. Nellie (and readers) were informed that although 'Melbourne is swarming with good boarding houses, the environments, tariffs, etc are totally unsuited to those who, like you and me, require a residence that provides homeliness, protection, religious influence, and social happiness, while our lots are compulsorily far from "Home and Mother"'. Readers were none-too-subtly given the idea that one day their own daughters could find themselves in the same situation as Nellie and Mary. They were encouraged to donate money to ensure the hostel's continued existence. In the story Nellie thanked Mary for her help and promised to pray that 'soon – very soon – good people may open their eyes to the urgent need of co-operating with the [hostel] committee's appeal for help to bring the "Infant Work" to a rapid and

[41] Catholic *Advocate*, 31 March 1917.

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more creditable growth [and a] more dignified standing amongst Melbourne's glorious Catholic establishments'.[43]

In the first anniversary edition of its journal, the CWSG set out the aims of the hostel. These were:

> (1)...protecting girls from the common temptations met with in non-Catholic boarding houses;
> (2) by providing a comfortable home at the lowest possible rates;
> (3) by allowing the fullest possible liberty to all within that home.[44]

The Gore Street hostel soon filled and later in 1917 a new, larger hostel was opened around the corner in Brunswick Street, next door to the Cathedral Hall. The Carmel Hostel, as it was 'baptised' in 1924, offered thirty-three beds – although the annual report for that year suggested that up to thirty-five women were sometimes accommodated at any one time. In 1924 girls were charged one pound per week for board and lodging, although 'it very often happens that a girl has to be tided over during a time she may be out of employment'.[45] But even with this larger capability, the women of the Guild were soon complaining about their inability to adequately cater for the demand, and the need for such accommodation.

In all of the reports about the hostel, stress was put on the freedom afforded to boarders. As we have seen, one of the aims of the hostel was 'to provide for the fullest possible liberty for all' residents. The hostel didn't see its role as enforcing curfews, because 'hitherto, in any of the excellent convents that received girls as boarders, the early hour at which the good nuns were obliged to close their doors at night, prevented many girls who wished to do so from making these houses their homes'. There were, however, some restrictions on coming and going, and boarders were expected to be in by nine o'clock in the evening. The first annual report of the CWSG argued that

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[42] *Advocate*, 12 May 1917.

[43] *Woman's Social Work*, December 1922.

[44] Ibid, August 1917.
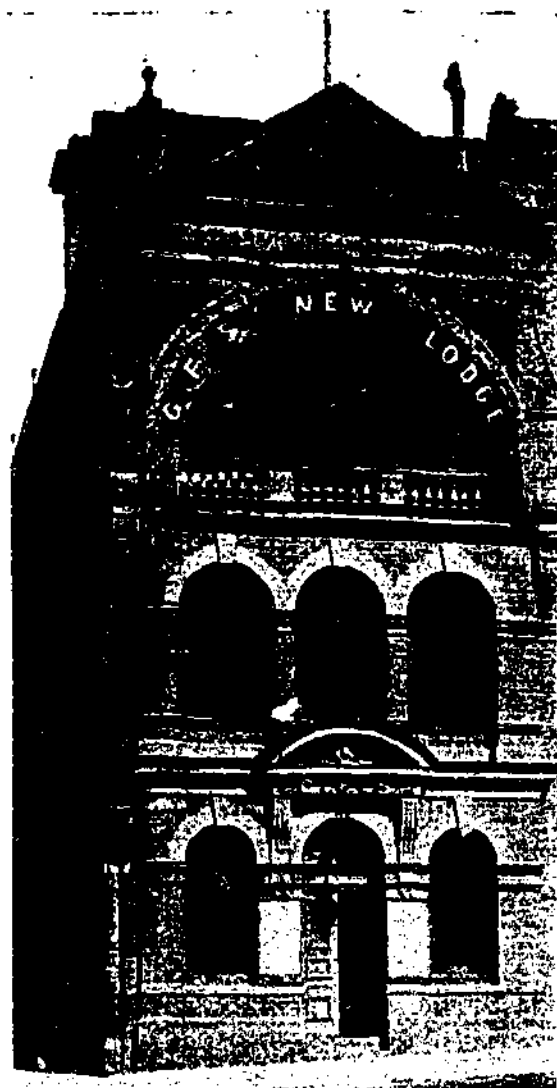
Illustration 13: Girls' Friendly Society Hostel, Spring Street, Melbourne.
Source: *Church of England Messenger*, 24 October 1913.
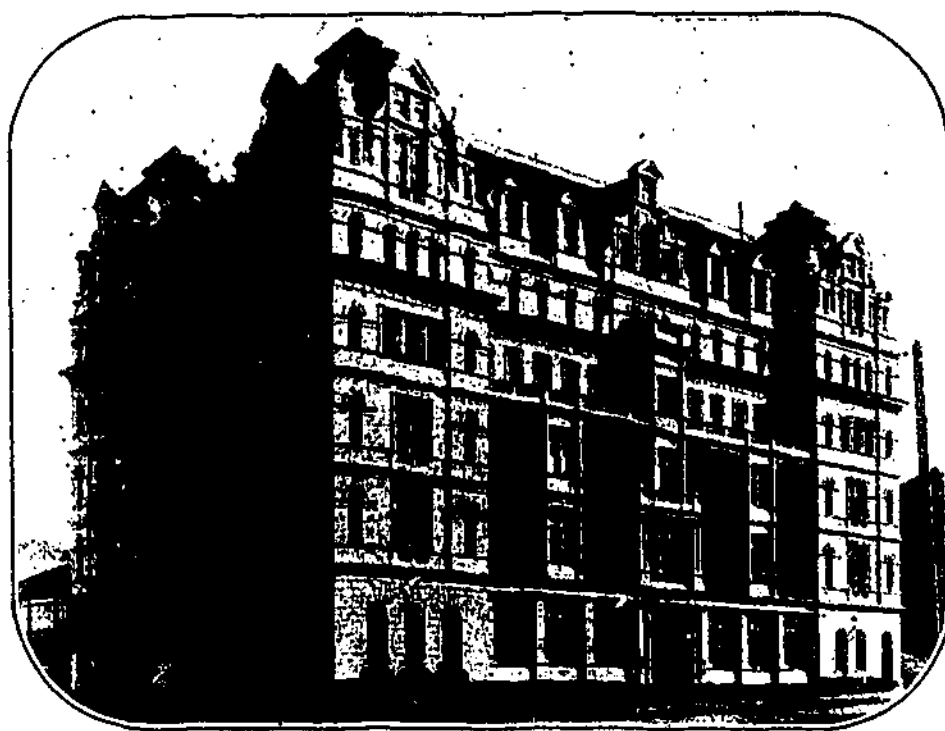
Illustration 14: St Anne's Hostel, Rathdowne Street, Carlton.
Source: *Horizon*, 1 June 1929
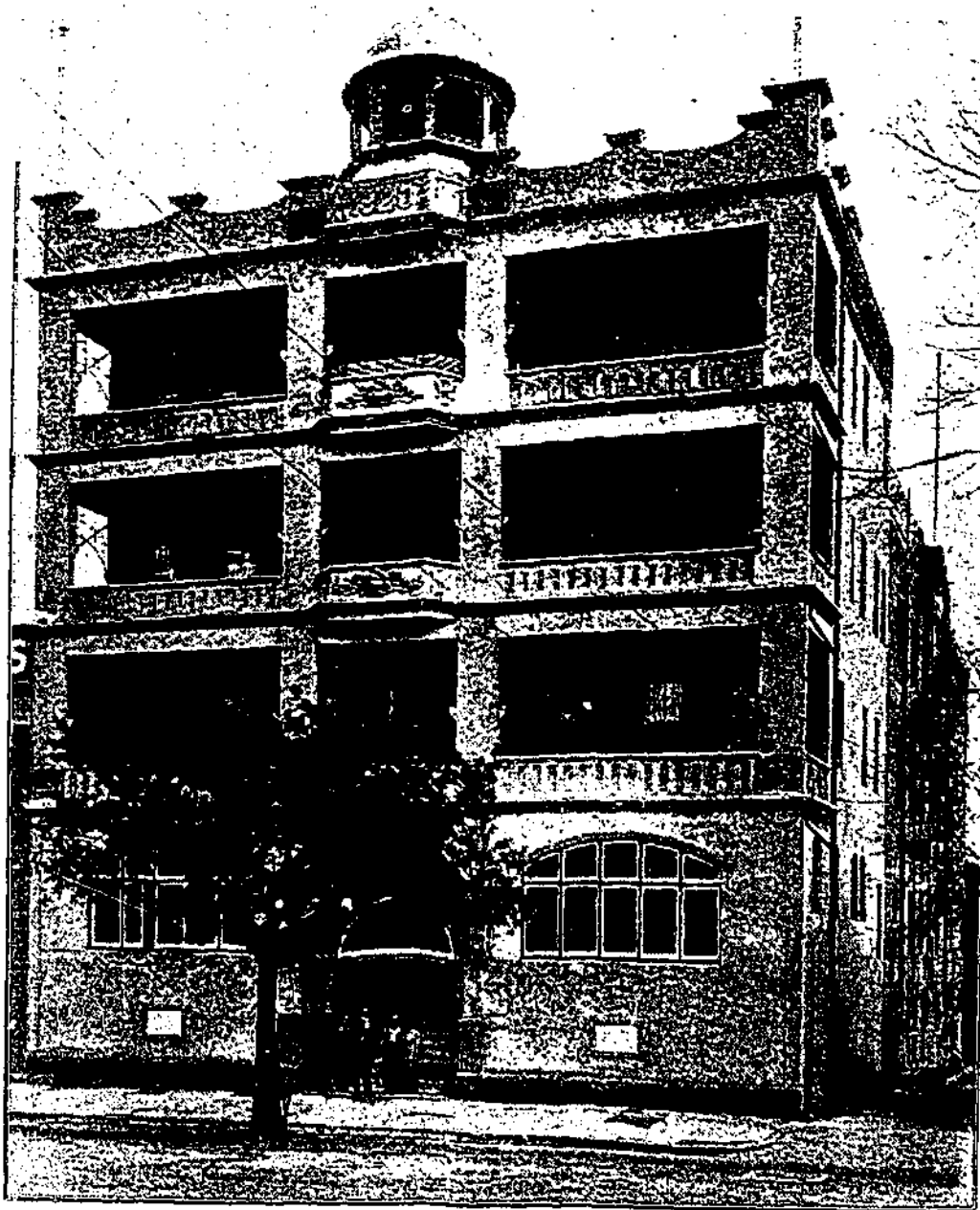
Illustration 15: Spring House, Spring Street, Melbourne.
Source: *Victory*, 1 April 1921.

Illustration 16: The dining room, Spring House.
Source: *Victory*, 1 April 921.

Illustration 17: Princess Mary Club, Lonsdale Street, Melbourne.
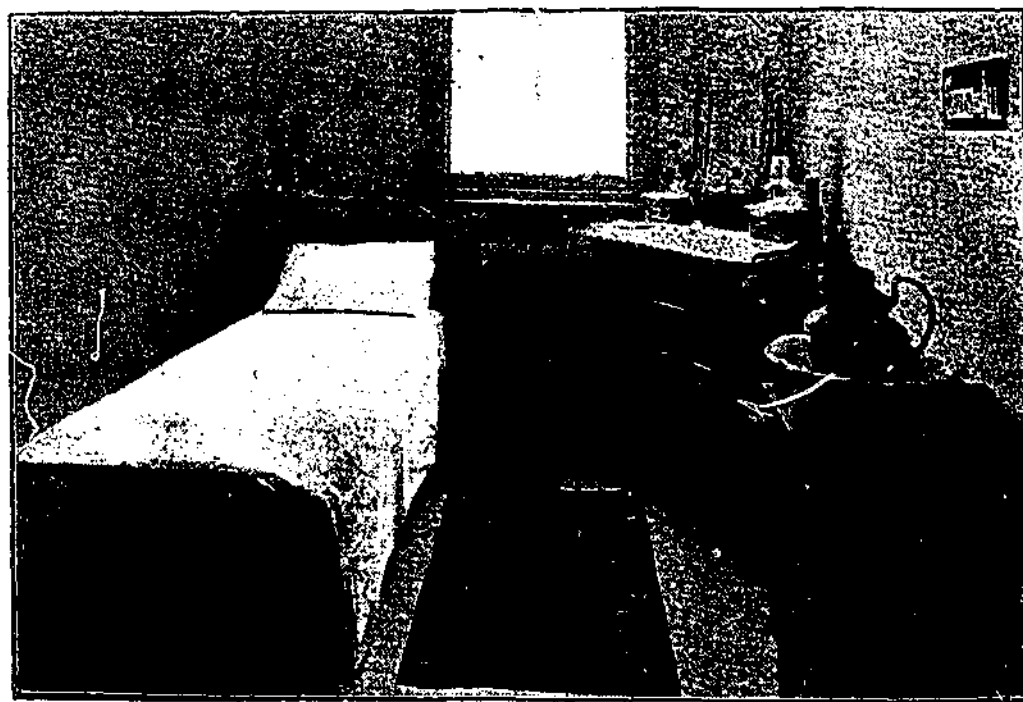
A BEDROOM FOR ONE—A home away from home.

**Illustration 18: View of 'a bedroom for one – a home away from home',
Spring House.**
Source: *Victory*, 1 April 1921.

the matron interferes as little as possible with the hours at which the girls come in at night, but she lets everyone clearly understand that it is not a house for people who habitually keep late hours. The hostel is a home, not a reformatory, and any girl who cannot conform to the ways of the house without harsh rules is not a suitable inmate.[46]

In her study of the CWSG and other similar organisations, Sally Kennedy claims that this concern with liberty reflected the feminist origins of the Guild. She argues that the Central Committee of the CWSG saw its role as providing accommodation for young women exploited by employers taking advantage of their cheap labour. Indicative of these concerns was a 'clause enabling hostel residents to elect representatives to CWSG committees dealing with hostel matters'.[47] Naomi Turner takes a similar labour and feminist line in her history of the Catholic Church in Australia, suggesting that the hostel represented an effort by the CWSG to ameliorate the worst conditions of young women's working conditions in Melbourne.[48]

While there is an element of truth in these arguments, the sponsors of religious-based hostels may also have had other objectives as well. The first and most obvious, was that the hostel wished to attract young female residents, who as Joanne Meyerowitz has pointed out for Chicago, were reluctant to submit to too much in the way of overt authoritarian control.[49] The second, and less obvious motive, was to ensure a certain level of control over the moral welfare of the inmates by allowing them the freedom to meet and entertain suitable (Catholic) friends and potential spouses, in acceptable surroundings, again along the lines suggested by Meyerowitz. A CWSG report of 1921 notes that in the 'hostel the girls would have, as it were, a home away from home and in which they would

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[45] 'Annual report of "Carmel" Hostel', *Horizon*, June 1925.

[46] *Woman's Social Work*, August 1917.

[47] S. Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism: Catholic Women's Struggles for Self-Expression*, St Patrick's College, Sydney, 1985, p.20.

[48] N. Turner, *Catholics in Australia: A Social History*, Vol. Two, Collins Dove, Melbourne, 1992, pp. 65–7.

[49] J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*.

enjoy the same liberties as they enjoyed in their own home'.[50] They would also, of course, be subject to the same restrictions. What was attempted, in other words, was to recreate the atmosphere of the private family home, with both its liberties in regards to entertaining friends and acquaintances, and the usual restrictions on courting and sexuality that would be imposed in the private family home.

In 1924 a member of the CWSG, Miss Louise (Lulu) Barry, brought the need for an expanded hostel to the attention of the Guild. In a wide-ranging address to the CWSG annual conference, later reprinted in the *Horizon*, she set out the reasons she believed Melbourne needed a newer and larger hostel for business girls.[51] These were essentially a reiteration of the ideas of moral danger and loneliness and isolation faced by these women in traditional boarding houses. The solution to these problems, according to Barry, was a better and larger hostel than the current one in Brunswick Street. The cost, although considerable, should be a secondary consideration to the need to provide safe and secure accommodation for young Catholic women. The hostel would actually be an investment, because saving girls' morals would ultimately result in less cost to the Church and the State in drunkenness and immorality. 'Women', she went on, 'are enormously important in the social order...In the hands of mother is the hope of the generations to come. Safeguard your women or lose the world.'[52]

In 1929, the Catholic Archdiocese and Archbishop Mannix provided the new hostel by agreeing to fund the purchase of a suitable site at the corner of Rathdowne and Victoria Streets in Carlton. The building had been constructed in the 1880s as a coffee palace known as Queen's Palace, but it appears to have been unoccupied for many years before it was bought by the Catholic Church (Illustration 14).[53] It was purchased by Mannix for forty thousand pounds and

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[50] *Woman's Social Work*, April 1921.

[51] *Horizon*, September 1924. Note *Women's Social Work* became the *Horizon* in 1924.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid, June 1929; *Advocate*, 9 May 1929. In some reports the building was described as Queen's Mansions, and in others as Queen's Palace. Some reports also gave its height four storeys but others more as six. Photographs confirm the latter. What it did have was four floors of bedrooms.

renovated to provide 'for a large dining room, three lounges, bathrooms on all floors' and 'accommodation for 200 girls'.[54] The building's name was changed to St Anne's Hall and it was put under the auspices of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul. It was opened in May 1930 by Mannix, who claimed that it represented an attempt by the church to provide a suitable place for young women working in the city, who previously 'had to go to other places where they had been well treated, but it was unworthy of the Catholic body that their girls should have to go to institutions which were really intended for others'. He also expressed his hope that the hostel 'would answer all requirements, and be a continued source of pride to the Catholics of Melbourne'.[55]

Horizon declared the project to be 'nothing less than an obligation we pay to our own womanhood', some of whom had previously been condemned to live a 'wretched boarding-house existence', and succumbed, out of loneliness and isolation, to the 'cheap pleasures that draw the shallow-minded' in the city.[56] Even so, Sally Kennedy claims that the CWSG had no great heart for the new project, seeing it as part of a conservative takeover of their work by Mannix and the Archdiocese. 'There was', she says, 'no apparent enthusiasm for the scheme in the Central Committee or the organisation generally', and the 'strained relations between Archbishop Mannix and the CWSG' were shown in his decision to not appoint a Guild representative to the committee administering the new hostel.[57] She also cites as evidence of this tension, the decision to close the Carmel Hostel and then reopen it a few months later, not as a hostel for business girls, but 'to cater for homeless, unemployed girls' affected by the gathering economic downturn.[58] The CWSG gave up its role as a carer for working women in the city

Elizabeth Loughlin gives a short description of the building in her wider study of Rathdowne Street, Carlton. See E. Loughlin, *Among the Terraces: A Carlton Street*, Carlton Forest Project, Carlton, 1988, pp. 6–7.

[54] *Advocate*, 25 July 1929.

[55] Ibid, 15 May 1930.

[56] *Horizon*, July 1929.

[57] S. Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, p. 53.

[58] Ibid, p. 54.

and management and control of St Anne's essentially passed into the hands of the Sisters of Charity where it remained until it closed in the 1970s.[59]

The Salvation Army opened a small hostel, Allenby Lodge, for girls working in the city in Burwood Road, Hawthorn in 1919. It had accommodation for thirty-six girls, and was designed to provide a 'home-like atmosphere' with 'clean, healthful comfort, and a strong moral and religious influence' for 'young girls in business who are away from their homes'.[60] But Allenby Lodge was always intended only as a small adjunct to the larger hostel then under construction at the corner of Spring and Lonsdale Streets in the City. Spring House, as this hostel became known, was planned during the early interwar years as the Army's major Melbourne hostel for young business women (Illustration 15). The Army claimed to have had to obtain special dispensation to begin work during the building restrictions imposed during the early interwar years. Its monthly journal, the *Victory*, told the story of how a Salvation Army Commissioner approached a senior Public Servant about the need to be exempted from these restrictions in order that the hostel be built. His explanation was said to have led the Public Servant to state that such a place was 'one of the vital necessities of the country' and organise for a permit to be issued.[61] Spring House thus became one of a series built by the Army in the capital cities during the interwar period.

The hostel was officially opened in early 1921 by the wife of the Governor, Lady Forster, who said she believed that in Australia's cities 'there are far too many opportunities for evil and far too few opportunities for good, and I think it is in meeting that difficulty that these Hostels are the greatest boon we can confer upon the young people of our cities and towns'. She went on to say that in her opinion, the hostel 'will do incalculable good in providing wholesome occupation,

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[59] E. Loughlin, *Among the Terraces*, p. 7; The Sisters of Charity opened a second hostel for young women working in the city in nearby Nicholson Street, Fitzroy in 1944; For a short discussion of its role see L. O'Brien, 'A Much Charitied Acre', in Cutten History Committee of the Fitzroy History Society (eds), *Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb*, pp. 78–9.

[60] *War Cry*, 12 July 1919.

[61] *Victory*, April 1921.

healthful recreation and rest, in place of the manifold temptations of street life in our large cities and towns'. Also speaking at the opening, the Salvation Army's Commissioner Hay said the hostel was intended as a place of shelter for the many 'unprotected girls in our midst'. The number of these girls, he argued, was more 'than seems to be safe for us as a people'.[62]

Spring House could accommodate up to 170 girls in single, double and dormitory rooms. The tariffs ranged from seven shillings per week for lodging only in a three-bed dormitory, to one pound for full board in a single room. The hostel had five storeys, with four upper levels and a basement. There were four bedrooms in the basement, and a dozen or so on the ground floor, but the majority were on the upper three floors. Each floor, bar the basement, had a bathroom and toilet. The ground floor contained a dining room (Illustration 16), and the first floor a residents' lounge. The two upper floors also had a sewing room 'fitted up as a practical workroom, where girls are afforded facilities for the making of their own clothes'.[63] There was also a roof-top garden, where residents could sit out or play games with fellow residents. The boarders could obtain full board at the hostel or attempt to reduce their costs by electing to take meals on a separate system in which they paid only for the meals they ate, rather than pay for all meals whether taken or not. They could also elect to come back to the hostel for a hot midday meal, thus saving themselves extra money.[64]

The Presbyterian Church set up a hostel for business girls in the old Scotch College buildings in Gipps Street (Parliament Place), East Melbourne in 1926.[65] It

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[62] *War Cry*, 12 March 1921.

[63] Salvation Army Heritage and Archives Centre, Melbourne, File: 'Memorandum for Members of Advisory Board for Development of the Spring and Lonsdale Site', 1959; *War Cry*, 12 March 1921.

[64] *Victory*, April 1921.

[65] Scotch College moved from East Melbourne to its current site in Hawthorn in 1926, leaving the site open for redevelopment; The Presbyterian Church had operated a hostel for girls in Abbotsford since 1917. This hostel, however, was designed for 'girls who, for the most part are able to pay only a moderate or nominal charge for their board. The girls are employed in factories and industries in the inner areas of the city'. The new hostel was aimed at more middle-class girls and women. PCV, *Proceedings of State General* Assembly, May 1938, p. 183.

was part of what was called the 'Three H's' program to use the Scotch College site for Presebyterian social services. The three 'H's' stood for a Babies Home, a Girls' Hostel and an Intermediate Hospital, all of which were designed

> To preserve Child Life by starting a HOME FOR BABIES
> To give our lovely girls a Christian home by providing a HOSTEL
> To care for our Sick in our own HOSPITAL (original emphasis).[66]

The fifty thousand pounds purchase price for these three ventures was raised by an appeal for money from Presbyterians around Victoria. The appeal was launched in May 1925 by the State Premier John Allan. Reporting on the meeting, a writer in the Presbyterian *Messenger* argued that the hostel component was needed for the 'many girls bravely battling away because it is necessary for them to do so for the sake of others, parents or younger brothers and sisters depending on them'. It was not to be a charity as such, because boarders would have to pay their way, but in any case the hostel was needed because the 'Church would be providing for them against the keen temptations which the city's loneliness would expose them to'.[67]

The hostel was originally known as the Presbyterian Girls Hostel (PGH), but became Chalmers Hall, on the initiative of the boarders, in 1937. It was opened in December 1926 by Lady Stonehaven, the wife of the Governor-General.[68] The policy of the hostel was to 'provide a comfortable home under Christian influences for working girls, away from home and guid (sic) them as we are able'.[69] The hostel could initially accommodate up to twenty-four boarders, but this was gradually expanded to about seventy by the middle-1930s. Its founders were concerned to provide a safe, secure, and morally-uplifting residence for young women coming to the city for work or study. Efforts were made to ensure that the existence of the hostel were made known to country congregations, 'as the benefits of the Hostel are mainly for girls outside the metropolitan area'.[70]

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[66] Presbyterian *Messenger*, 22 January 1926.

[67] Ibid, 22 May 1925.

[68] Ibid, 10 December 1926.

[69] Minutes, 6 September 1928.

[70] PCV, *Proceedings of State General* Assembly, May 1927.

Representatives of the Hostel stressed its safety, convenience, and friendly atmosphere. The Convenor of the Hostel Committee, D. McCrae Stewart, stated in his report to the Church's General Assembly in 1932, that

> If parents are looking for a city home for their girls, they will find nothing in Melbourne so likely to meet their requirements as our own Hostel in Parliament Place, East Melbourne. It is in a convenient and healthful situation. It stands so near the city that travelling expenses are reduced to a minimum. It offers good and bright fellowship and provides all the elements of a real home.

He also 'earnestly urge[d] ministers and representative elders to keep the advantages of the Girls Hostel well before their people'.[71]

As we have seen, this concept of the 'home' in opposition to the dangers and loneliness and isolation of the boarding or lodging house was a strong motivation in the establishment of hostels. Unlike Kennedy's suggestion for the CWSG, however, the founders of the PGH had little time for any ideas of boarders being allowed freedoms or liberties. At an early meeting of the management committee it was decided that 'lights out' should be at 10.30 pm on weekdays and Saturdays and 10.00 pm on Sundays, and that 'except by special permission of the matron all girls should be in the Hostel' by that time. This policy was tested in early 1928 when a resident was asked to leave because her employment required her to maintain late hours. The nature of her work, as much as her late hours, appears, however, to have been of concern to the hostel committee. The young woman had offered to leave the hostel after taking 'a position at the Green Mill (which is dancing hall)'. The matron allowed her to stay at the hostel for several weeks, before a request to stay out until midnight had forced her to ask the girl to leave. The committee concurred with the matron's decision because the Green Mill was not 'a desirable place', and because it was thought that allowing one girl to remain out late would provide a bad precedent, given that 'late hours are fraught with moral danger'.[72] The committee did, however, attempt to suggest that its decision

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[71] Ibid, May 1932.

[72] Minutes, 21 February 1928; 6 September 1928.

was based solely on administrative difficulties rather than because it objected to the dance hall.

In the early 1920s, the Superintendent of the Wesley Central Mission, Reverend Samuel Hoban also became concerned at the dangers faced by young women coming to work in Melbourne from the country and overseas. Renate Howe and Shurlee Swain suggest he believed that many of the prostitutes his organisation dealt with in Little Lonsdale Street behind the Mission, had originally come to the city looking for work, but had been duped or forced into prostitution by unscrupulous acquaintances.[73] Hoban was also concerned that many of the young women at the Mission's new Girls Memorial Home at Fairfield, were not only pregnant, but also infected with Venereal Disease. This was bad enough, but the fact that many were middle-class and from 'good families' caused him to worry that they had been 'led astray' after coming to the city to find work or study. There was a need, he believed, for somewhere for young working women to live in safety and comfort in the city, away from the temptations of which they were either unaware, or too innocent to fully understand. The solution was to provide, like the Salvation Army, the YWCA, and increasingly the other mainstream churches, a centrally-located hostel for young women workers.[74] Writing in the Mission's weekly newspaper, the *Spectator* in 1922, Hoban and his associates asked readers how they would feel about these young women in unsuitable accommodation, 'If She Were Your Girl?' They appealed for donations to help in the establishment of a hostel, as there was 'nothing more urgently needed in Melbourne today than places of safety for girls'. Because of the 'difficulty of getting suitable lodgings', they argued, girls 'are...exposed to the greatest moral peril'. Parents were asked to donate money towards the estimated twenty-five thousand pounds needed to build such a hostel, 'as though the girl we want to protect were your girl. Who knows? Someday she might be.'

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[73] R. Howe and S. Swain, *The Challenge of the City*, p. 92–3.
[74] Ibid.

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Money for a hostel was eventually raised from various Methodist businessmen and their families, and a hostel was built on land acquired next door to the Wesley Church in Lonsdale Street in the City. The Princess Mary Club (PMC), as it became known, was opened by the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, SJ Morell, and the wife and daughter of one of its benefactors, 'Aspro' millionaire Alfred Nicholas, in November 1926 (Illustration 17). A temporary hostel had already been operating in Lonsdale Street since 1924, but the new Club was much larger and provided 'a place of safety every night for 120 girls'.[75] Speaking at the opening, WA Watt MP, described it as 'one of the finest attempts at mingled civics and practical Christianity' he had seen in Australia. Samuel Hoban claimed he had been led to establish the hostel by the 'dreadful stories told to me by girls of the things to which they had been subjected, in places of accommodation in this city'.[76] 'MH', a 'lady journalist who happens to be a Roman Catholic', wrote glowingly of the PMC in *Table Talk* in January 1927. She described it as similar to a 'First-class Hotel', and the 'most ideal home any city girl could possibly imagine at an inclusive cost to her of 30/– a week'. 'MH' was pleasantly surprised at what she found in the hostel, as she had gone there 'looking for the "catch"' – expecting to find 'an atmosphere of austerity and perhaps intolerance, and of restrictions upon personal freedom, which no girl of spirit could tolerate'. She 'found none of these things', and 'came away convinced that here at least a lonely girl will find comfort, cleanliness, kindliness and tolerance'.[77]

Each year the Annual Report of the Central Mission would have a theme, mainly relating to the necessity for Christian charity or help for the poor. The 1928 Annual Report, *Christianity in Action*, argued that the PMC showed that 'Prevention is Better than Cure', and that its role was to 'keep lives healthy and sweet, thus preventing them from becoming social problems'. The 'costly enterprise' was undertaken, it was argued, so that 'the country girl engaged in

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[75] *Spectator*, 24 November 1926; Central Mission, *Annual Report*, 1926–7; R. Howe and S. Swain, *The Challenge of the City*, p. 93.

[76] *Spectator*, 24 November 1926.

[77] *Table Talk*, 6 January 1927, reproduced in *Spectator*, 12 January 1927.

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business in the city [has] a safe, comfortable and economical home' whose 'atmosphere is one of friendliness and goodwill'.[78] The 'homeliness' and comfort of the hostel were constantly stressed, and it was presented as an opportunity 'for good girls to live in the heart of a great city without unduly exposing them to the temptations which otherwise would be inevitable'.[79] The same theme of work that was 'preventative and constructive' was continued in subsequent reports, usually with the theme of caring for 'delicate' and 'fragile' young women before they became 'broken earthenware' that had to be put back together.[80] The arguments here were remarkably similar to those used in Catholic journals, with their emphasis on the role of women in keeping the nation pure and moral. The emphasis was also on the cost-savings involved in early-intervention in potential social problems, rather than dealing with the supposed economic and social costs of vice.

Standards of Accommodation

Standards of facilities and rooms in the hostels were fairly basic, although probably of a similar level to that found in most low-to-middle-range boarding houses. All the hostels featured some sort of a communal lounge and dining-room where meals were usually taken on a self-service basis. These were usually on the ground floor, or at least on a separate floor to the boarders' bedrooms, mainly because this was where men were allowed to be entertained. No males – including in some cases fathers or brothers – were allowed access to the floors containing bedrooms. St Anne's was unusually well-provided for with lounges – having three.[81] Bedrooms were usually single, although in some of the hostels a variety of room types, from single to three or four beds per room, were available. The provision of multiple-sleeping rooms was as much dependent on availability of space, as on the desire to provide cheaper accommodation. The Carmel Hostel, for

[78] Annual Report, 1928.
[79] Annual Report, 1932.
[80] Ibid.
[81] *Advocate*, July 25 1929.

instance was forced to sleep boarders in hallways at one stage in the 1920s when demand was extreme.[82] Most hostels provided only one bathroom per floor, although these contained multiple sinks, baths and showers. The PMC and Chalmers Hall followed the standard Health Act regulation of one shower bath and one toilet for every ten boarders.[83] St Anne's was again unusually well-endowed in this area, with each floor having 'at either end three bath-rooms, nineteen wash basins, three showers, and five lavatories'.[84] Individual rooms were not equipped with running water, but residents were usually provided with a jug and basin in their room. The one exception to this was the GFS Lodge, which was rebuilt in the late 1930s, and where rooms were equipped with a basin.[85]

The rooms themselves were comfortable, although spartan. At the PMC they contained a bed, wardrobe, dressing table and chair. Floors were covered in linoleum set off with a scatter rug.[86] Single rooms at Spring House were furnished in what the *War* Cry described as 'the style of those in a comfortable working-class home' (Illustration 18).[87] Rooms were small – not more than about ten feet square. This was about the same size as those offered in private boarding and rooming houses, but hostel advertisements stressed that the communal lounges and dining rooms offered space for residents to relax, and perhaps read or socialise. The by that time standard critique of the boarding house was that it offered neither, and residents were therefore trapped alone in their rooms or forced out onto the streets to socialise. The managers of hostels argued, in effect, that the dining and lounge rooms increased the average amount of space available to each resident. As discussed in Chapter Three, in relation to boarding houses, it was the added extras of hostel living that made them economically attractive to residents. Boarders were provided with all sheets and bedding, as well as towels and other

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[82] 'Annual Report of the "Carmel" Hostel', *Horizon*, June 1925.

[83] *Spectator*, 12 January 1927; Presbyterian Girls Hostel Minutes, Meeting 19 February 1926.

[84] *Advocate*, 12 September 1929.

[85] *Jeanne Stanford* (Pseudonym). Interview, North Melbourne 4 December 1997.

[86] *Spectator*, 12 January 1927.

[87] *War Cry*, 12 March 1921

manchester and did not, therefore, have to fund the purchase of these out of their reasonably meagre wages. The hostels also provided laundry and washing facilities at a small extra charge, so boarders were able to avoid costs associated with commercial laundries. Also, and again as with boarding houses, they were not required to provide their own cooking and eating utensils – another cost saving.

With all of the hostels, it is important to stress the important communal outcomes, as well as the more negative aspects of protection and control. As Joanne Meyerowitz has pointed out, these places provided a means whereby young people newly arriving in a strange and lonely city, could establish social and economic contacts.[88] They were also places where young and perhaps innocent rural youth could learn to negotiate their way through the sometimes baffling ways of the city. For many, the hostels acted as 'staging posts' between life in the parental home outside of Melbourne and independent life alone or with friends in a flat or rooms.[89] Some were also the first place newly-arrived single women migrants would stay in Melbourne after arriving from overseas. The YWCA saw one of its roles as providing a temporary home for 'migrant girls', especially the large numbers arriving in the early interwar period. Around the country it set up various 'Immigration Committee and Overseas Club[s] to welcome, advise, house and feed' new arrivals.[90] In the denominational hostels this role was also stressed by commentators and promoters. The PMC's Hoban, for example, wrote in the 1928 Wesley Annual Report that a 'number of residents [of the club] are friendless English girls, who are directed to us when they had nowhere else to go'.[91] They were thus spared the temptations and threats of the city, while at the same introduced to a circle of acquaintances, and perhaps given advice on job opportunities and potential permanent accommodation vacancies.

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[88] J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, pp. 80–1.
[89] *Jeanne Stanford*, Interview.
[90] M. Dunn, *The Dauntless Bunch*, p. 99
[91] Central Mission, Annual Report, 1928.

For many young women the hostels were also great fun, giving them access to a wide group of people – mostly in their teens and twenties, and of a similar religion and social class – with all that meant for a social life in the city. Reports of all the hostels extolled the spirit of camaraderie they engendered. Mary, the fictional resident of Melbourne's Catholic hostel in the 1922 *Women's Social Work* article, stressed its warmth and friendliness to her friend Nellie, suggesting that it was 'really "H-o-m-e"' for the boarders who had 'there a happy family life'.[92] An early post-World War Two resident of the GFS Lodge, *Jeanne Stanford* told me that the residents all 'got on very well...that's why it was a family feeling...it was all age groups'. She and her fellow residents would socialise at nights and at weekends. Some would go hiking, or to the football, or to the movies on Saturday afternoon before heading out dancing on Saturday night. Girls could also meet potential partners among the brothers and male friends of other hostel dwellers. They also made some lifelong friendships. *Jeanne* still meets with a group of former boarders for an annual reunion, over forty years after she left the hostel.[93]

The Depression

The Depression caused great hardship to both the residents of the hostels and the hostels themselves. Residents found themselves without work and therefore unable to afford rents, while the hostels were forced to cut back facilities as demand fell and those who remained were unable to pay full fees as their incomes declined. All the hostels instituted programs whereby boarders who were unemployed or underemployed could remain in residence until their situation improved. As early as 1928 the Matron of the GFS Lodge reported to her committee that unemployment was having an effect on the hostel's fortunes. In June of that year she wrote that 'many of our girls are out of work and have had to return home'. The strain on finances was also beginning to show in the books. 'It worries me', she wrote, 'as I never want to write the word "deficit" if I can help

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[92] *Women's Social Work*, December 1922.
[93] *Jeanne Stanford*, Interview.

it'.[94] The effects of unemployment on the hostel were also often indirect. The Matron's report for July 1928 complained of the extra cost of daytime fires needed by boarders, who because of their being out of work were 'miserable and had to be kept warm'.[95] As the Depression-proper set in the hostel instituted a policy of not evicting boarders whose rents were in arrears, but this too put a strain on finances. One boarder eventually left the hostel in April 1931 owing more than twenty-one pounds in arrears. She paid it back slowly over the next several years.[96]

Similar problems faced the PGH. In 1931 it instituted a policy of allowing unemployed girls to pay half-tariffs, in order that they not be put out on the streets. In July of that year the Matron reported that the boarders had requested a reduction in charges of one shilling per week, and that this policy had been accepted. Costs were reduced by dismissing the hostel's watchman and maid.[97] In 1932 the Convenor of the Hostel Committee, D. McCrae Stewart reported that the 'difficulties of the public situation' had caused a decline in demand for places of the order of about twenty per cent, reducing the numbers of boarders from the normal average of seventy to fifty-six. He expected no upturn in the hostel's fortunes until the general economic situation improved.[98] The PMC also followed a policy of allowing a girl who was 'thrown out of work...to remain on until another door of employment opens for her'.[99] The Wesley Central Mission also set up a 'Workless Girls Club' in La Trobe Street so that unemployed girls could meet safely during the day, while keeping up the contacts often lost during periods of unemployment.[100] The Catholic Women's Social Guild also dealt with the

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[94] Minutes, Meeting July 1928, Matron's Report for June.

[95] Ibid, Meeting August 1928.

[96] Ibid, Meeting May 1931.

[97] PCV Minutes, 25 March 1931.

[98] Presbyterian Church of Victoria, *Proceedings of State General Assembly*, May 1932.

[99] Central Mission, Annual Report 1928.

[100] Ibid, 1932.

problem of unemployment by reopening its Carmel Hostel site in Fitzroy 'to shelter homeless unemployed girls', without charge to residents if necessary.[101]

Conclusion

What these hostels provided was an alternative to the boarding house and chamber for young, mainly middle-class women, either forced to Melbourne in search of work, or who elected to go there for the opportunities and lifestyle the city offered. Hostels allowed young women to find their feet in the city, while at the same time alleviating some of the anxieties of country parents about the fate of their daughters in the 'immoral' city. The hostels were quite well-appointed and provided nutritious, if none-too-adventurous food for young women who were in often poorly-paid employment. They also gave instant access to a social group, and thus eliminated some of the loneliness and isolation of young women adapting to the city's ways. Perhaps equally importantly, the hostels were supervised by respectable elders of one's own religious group who helped to assure concerned parents that their daughters' moral welfare was protected. They also cemented allegiance to the parents' religious orientation by ensuring that boarders mixed with their co-religionists and met appropriate members of the opposite sex in controlled and approved circumstances. The hostels were also centrally located, and so offered girls not only cheap access to work opportunities, but also to the social, educational and cultural offerings of Melbourne.

As boarding houses fell into disrepute in the 1920s and beyond, hostels acted as one of the 'funnels' through which the middle-class could safely push its members who didn't fit the traditional model of the nuclear family in its own home in a dormitory suburb. Hostels were the approved route for younger female members of this group, while younger men of the same class were expected to remain as boarders in private houses, where their domestic needs, such as cooking and

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[101] L. Quinlan and U. Clinton, 'What is the Catholic Women's Guild: The Story of the Catholic Women's Social Guild (1916–1938)', *The Australian Catholic Truth Society Record*, 20 July

cleaning, would be met by a landlady. As boarding fell out of favour, however, the mansion flat in an inner suburb became increasingly acceptable for some of these unmarried men, and for childless couples and older single women, for whom the boarding house was no longer a respectable or private enough option. The next section of the thesis involves a detailed study of these flats. their owners and tenants, and the often hostile reception the coming of this new form of accommodation received in a self-described 'city of homes'.

1938, (No. 141), p. 11 (Thanks to the Catholic Historical Commission for this source); S. Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, p. 54.

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Chapter Six

Flats in Melbourne 1906–1940

Introduction

As boarding houses became less popular and increasingly seen as inappropriate places for members of the middle-class to reside, those who couldn't or wouldn't live in detached houses in the suburbs increasingly moved into self-contained flats. Flats attracted childless couples, bachelors, single young women, older single and widowed women, and some newly arrived migrants, for whom single family houses or the new hostels were inappropriate. The building of these flats and the lifestyles of their tenants was a frequently discussed topic in interwar Melbourne, featuring in many stories in the daily papers and popular magazines, especially in the 1920s and 1930s. Yet in contrast to, say, State Bank houses, Californian Bungalows, and the general development of Melbourne in the interwar years discussed in Chapter One, very little has been written about flats or their inhabitants since.

The owners and residents of flats were subject to close scrutiny and their respectability closely scrutinised, especially in the early years of the twentieth century. This was because flats were considered a new, and possibly foreign, element of the city's social and physical landscape. To live in a flat went against the traditional notions of privacy and separate residence so prevalent in Melbourne and the rest of Australia. For young people, and in particular single young women, flat-living represented a highly visible symbol of the new social freedoms available after the First World War. Flat-dwellers therefore had to be very sure of their own respectability and uphold that of their fellow-residents. One means of ensuring this was to refer to flats in terms different to that used for other types of multi-unit accommodation, such as tenements and apartment houses, which were by the 1920s coming to be viewed in negative terms.

The term 'flat' derives from the old Scottish 'flaet', 'a word used as early as the twelfth century to mean an independent set of rooms'.[1] In Australia and England the term was also traditionally used to refer to floors in buildings. Office buildings, for instance, were said to be of so many 'flats' as late as 1925 in Melbourne City Council (MCC) *Rate Books*.[2] The term 'apartment' on the other hand, derives from the French 'appartement', and came into use in English in the seventeenth century.[3] The third possible name for these places was 'tenement', which derives from the Latin word 'tenere', meaning to hold. By the thirteenth century, this term had evolved to mean any dwelling place or abode.[4] In Melbourne 'flat' was the preferred option for middle-class multi-unit dwellings, because the term 'apartment', was associated with rooming houses, which even more than boarding houses, were losing their social status in the twentieth century. 'Tenement' was also suspect, as these dwellings were defined as accommodation that had been sub-divided from existing houses, but which were not fully self-contained to include a bathroom – and were hence not far removed from 'apartment houses'.

In an unusual paradox, the French 'apartment', rather than the English 'flat', became the accepted designation for multi-unit buildings in North America.[5] This was because apartments had originally been known as 'French Flats' in both England and America, but this term fell out of favour in the late nineteenth century, partly because of the 'foreignness' denoted by the expression.[6]

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[1] A. Alpern, *Luxury Apartment Houses of Manhattan: An Illustrated History*, Dover Publications, New York, 1992, p. 11; The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) suggests the term 'flaet' in its 'original form survived into the present century' in Scotland, *OED*, Second Edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989.

[2] MCC *Rate Books*, PROV, VPRS 5708 Unit 61.

[3] *OED*.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Tenements were never really considered acceptable anywhere at any time.

[6] J. Tarn, 'French Flats for the English in Nineteenth-century London' in A. Sutcliffe (ed), *Multi-Storey Living: The British Working Class Experience*, Croom Helm, London, 1974, pp. 19–40; E. Collins Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1990, p. 2.

'Apartment', almost by default, therefore became the term used by developers when these types of buildings began to appear in large numbers in the cities of the American north-east late in the century. In his study of Toronto's early twentieth century apartment houses, Richard Dennis argues that promoters of apartment living were keen to not call their buildings 'flats', because of the association there with 'French flats', which was considered bohemian and foreign in a city that resolutely maintained its Protestant and English character. 'Apartments', on the other hand were, by the early twentieth century, considered suitably American, and therefore acceptably Anglo-Saxon in origin.[7]

Melbourne's flat-dwellers were also helped in their attempts to maintain their respectable status by both the names attached to their individual blocks, and the social status of many of the earliest residents of these places. The use of epithets such as 'mansions' or 'house' in the names of flat-blocks, added a certain sophisticated cachet as well as evoking images of the West End of London or increasingly, of the major boulevards of New York or other American cities. In the early years of flat development, residents and commentators were also reassured of the acceptability of this type of living arrangement by the decision of some of Melbourne's most prominent citizens to invest in or reside in flats in the city centre and the inner southern and eastern suburbs.[8] If the rich and influential felt able to live in a flat, the argument went, then so could those who aspired to a similar social standing. Similar trends towards flats were occurring in other Anglo-Saxon societies at this time, and many of these same problems and solutions to the 'flat problem' were put forward in these places, suggesting perhaps, that they were one response to the demand for new accommodation options in an industrialising society.

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[7] See R. Dennis, 'Interpreting the apartment house', p. 306.

[8] Ibid, p. 316–7; Melbourne's first block of purpose-built flats was Melbourne Mansions, owned by the Syme family, in Collins Street. See T. Sawyer, 'Residential Flats in Melbourne', p. 6.

Flats in Australia and other Anglo-Saxon Countries.

To date Melbourne's flats have mainly been studied as part of their contribution to distinctly local urban and social landscapes. Anne Longmire argues that the rapid increase in the number of flats in St Kilda in the interwar years was part of a 'scramble for profits' that was changing the suburb's social and physical profile. In the minds of many longer term residents, the changes brought by flats and flat-dwellers were not necessarily for the good.[9] Sally Wilde sees Prahran's flats in a slightly different light, arguing – after a leader writer in the *Prahran Telegraph* – that flats were a logical outcome of the decline in the number of servants available in Melbourne, and therefore a solution to the housing needs of some non-traditional households.[10]

She argues that Prahran's flats – which were mostly in South Yarra and Toorak – catered for a different market than did St Kilda's, and that they and their residents were therefore not as unwelcome as those in other less-affluent suburbs. 'In St Kilda', she says

> flat building consolidated a change in the social status of the suburb, in South Yarra and Toorak it did not. Successful merchants, pastoralists, lawyers and newspapermen continued to live in the area and they were joined by a number of manufacturers. They came and went as fortunes rose and fell, but the status of the hills south of the river remained as high as ever.[11]

Prahran's flats were also less objectionable than those in St Kilda because they were usually built on reasonably large allotments carved out of the grounds of large former estates. They were therefore less likely to overwhelm streets and overshadow neighbours than in St Kilda, where flats were often built on small lots formerly occupied by villas.[12]

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[9] A Longmire, *St Kilda*, p. 60.

[10] S. Wilde, *The History of Prahran*, p. 62.

[11] Ibid, p. 66.

[12] See A. Longmire, *St Kilda*, p. 64.

St Kilda Road also became a major location for flats in the 1920s and beyond. Judith Buckrich has documented these as part of her wider study of the road over 150 or so years. She writes that, unlike in Continental Europe, flats were never particularly sought-after in Melbourne, but that from 'the 1920s apartment (sic) living started to become slightly more popular'.[13] Buckrich goes on to argue, however, that flats and all they stood for, did encounter resistance from staunchly Protestant Melbourne.[14] Susan Priestley suggests that flats in the interwar period were a response to a number of factors, including the shortage of domestic servants and the increasing preference for smaller families. She agrees with Buckrich and Wilde that they were not popular with some groups and that in areas such as Prahran and South Yarra, municipal councils responded to resident concerns about amenity and such, by introducing by-laws enabling them to exert 'more control over flat development'.[15] She mentions no such controls in South Melbourne, where flats were 'first noted in the City Surveyor's reports for 1933–34', but 'increased markedly' in number after 1935. Most were built on '[f]ormer mansion sites in Queens Road or Beaconsfield Parade', although others were built in many bayside streets in Albert Park and Middle Park.[16] In Hawthorn flats have been described as the place for the fashionable young, who moved to blocks such as Iluka, and others built along the riverside hills in the 1930s.[17]

In general, however, most of the detailed research into Melbourne's flats has revolved around their position as architectural oddities in a city overwhelmingly dominated by single family houses. Architectural historians have studied flats in some detail, but rarely have they considered their social context.[18] A minor exception to this rule is Terry Sawyer's study of Melbourne's pre-1950 flats,

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[13] J. Buckrich, *Melbourne's Grand Boulevard*, p. 96.

[14] Ibid, p. 97.

[15] S. Priestley, *The Victorians: Making Their Mark*, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates, Sydney, 1984, pp. 258-9.

[16] S. Priestley, *South Melbourne: A History*, p. 353.

[17] See V. Peel et al, *A History of Hawthorn*, p. 258

[18] R. Boyd, *Australia's Home*, pp. 100, 176–7; P. Goad, 'Best Overend – Pioneer Modernist in Melbourne', *Fabrications: The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand*, Vol. 6, June 1995, pp. 101–124.

which includes some social and historical analysis. His thesis documents the history of opposition to flats in Australia, as well as the development of flats overseas and in Sydney, before embarking on a series of discussions of the reasons for the development of Melbourne's early flats. The major thrust of the thesis, however, is the architectural features of flats, including their structure, site layout, and design elements.[19] Other architectural historians have studied enclaves of flats as parts of localised conservation studies, although few have bothered to locate these in a social context.[20]

Architectural historians have shown special interest in perhaps the largest collection of interwar flats in any one location in Melbourne – the series of blocks built by Howard Lawson in Alexandra Avenue, South Yarra. Lawson was an architect by profession, but operated as a property developer, describing himself in promotional literature as 'the architect who builds'.[21] At various times from 1922 until 1941 he and his associates built over 200 flats in the area between the railway line and Punt Road, overlooking the Yarra River.[22] Robyn McKenzie, who has produced the best study of these flats, argues that Lawson was heavily influenced by the glamour of the American film industry, and used his buildings to bring a touch of Hollywood to Melbourne.[23] Virtually alone among the architectural historians, McKenzie recognises the social aspects of flats:

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[19] T. Sawyer, 'Residential Flats in Melbourne'.

[20] R. Storey, 'Significant Flats in St Kilda', *Trust News*, May 1989, pp. 18–19; M. Lewis, 'Historical Introduction', in Nigel Lewis and Associates, *St Kilda Conservation Study Area One*, Melbourne, 1982, p. 38; David Bick in Conjunction with Wilson Sayer Core Pty Ltd, *St Kilda Conservation Study Area Two: Volume One, Individual Elements and Conservation Areas*, St Kilda, c1984–5. This report attempts to chart the 'social implications of flats', but manages only to discuss the situation in the early 1980s as flats were becoming rundown and neglected, p. 32; D. Dunbar, 'Residential Redevelopment in Melbourne and Sydney 1920s and 1930s: A Comparative Analysis', in T. Dingle (ed), *The Australian City: Future/Past: The Third Annual Planning History/Urban History Conference. Proceedings*, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 113–126.

[21] Nigel Lewis and Associates, *Prahran Conservation Study: Identification of Buildings and Areas of Major Significance*, Melbourne, c.1984, Section Four, Buildings and Area, pp 1–1 to 1–3, 'Alexandra Avenue Area'.

[22] Ibid.

[23] R. McKenzie, 'Style in Australian Architecture: A Vignette from the 30s', Unpublished BA (Hons) Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1983, Ch. 3, 'Romanticism: The Philosophy of an Eclectic, or Hooray for Hollywood!'.

The growth of flats in the thirties also had a deeper, but parallel social origin, in the perception of 'modern life' which was then very much in vogue. The freedom from domestic pressures offered by a well-appointed flat gained in appeal as the Victorian and Edwardian delight in 'home pleasures' was challenged by the expansive 'modern' way of life.[24]

The social and architectural history of flats has attracted more attention in Sydney. This is probably because flats there were more numerous and more obtrusive, even before the rapid growth of the high-rise sector from the 1960s.[25] Ruth Thompson discussed their architecture, developers, tenants and later, owner-occupiers from 1900 to the 1980s. She argues that from the turn of the century onward, flats had a rather poor image, and were seen as a 'second rate solution for Sydney's second class citizens'.[26] Flats were considered to be similar to boarding houses and tenements, and according to Thompson, conjured up in the minds of the middle-class 'an image of seedy places' carved out of once-grand mansions.[27] By the interwar period, however, flats had become more acceptable, and the tall blocks in Kings Cross and some of the better harbourside suburbs, had become highly sought-after by fashionable members of Sydney society, especially childless couples. They were also reasonably expensive to rent and thus excluded the young and the poor – those popularly seen as the problem group in flats.[28]

Richard Cardew's major study of Sydney's flats argues that they became increasingly popular early this century as the difficulties in attracting domestic servants increased.[29] They were a feature of Sydney life since at least the turn of the century and accounted for over 11% of the total housing stock as early as

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[24] Ibid, p. 10; Donald Dunbar, in contrast, simply refers to Howard's developments as lacking the 'overall planning ideas' needed to make large-scale flat living successful. See 'Residential Development', p. 115.

[25] RW Archer, *The Market for New Multi-unit Housing in Sydney and Melbourne*, National Housing Economics Conference, Sydney 23–25 August, 1978.

[26] R. Thompson, 'Sydney's Flats: A Social and Political History', p. 22.

[27] Ibid, p. 22.

[28] Ibid, Ch. 2, 'Flats and the Anti-Flat Movement'.

[29] R. Cardew, 'Flats in Sydney: the thirty per cent solution?', p. 69.

1933.[30] Sydney's flats were mostly built in harbourside areas and near the beaches, although Ashfield, 'a western suburb of quite mixed residential development' was the fourth most popular municipality for flats in the late 1930s.[31] Like Thompson, Cardew argues that flats catered for the well-to-do, and that the rents of flats tended to be higher than those for houses. In 1933, he notes, more flats than houses had rents over four pounds per week in Sydney, although overall in the city, 'there were three houses rented for each flat rented'.[32] Peter Spearritt has also looked at Sydney's interwar flats as part of his larger study of the city from the 1920s to the 1970s. He describes these places as 'the antithesis of suburbia', and a rejection of Australia's 'house and garden' culture. Some Sydneysiders also saw them as evidence of an 'increasing sophistication' in their city.[33]

The only other major study of interwar flats in Australia was undertaken by Jenny Gregory and Robyn Taylor in 1992, and looked at the social and architectural aspects of Perth's small number of these dwellings.[34] Flats there were blamed for a number of social ills, including a decline in the birth-rate, as they were considered incompatible with family life.[35] Gregory and Taylor's study, like Thompson's for Sydney, has some trouble in differentiating between purpose-built flats and conversions of older houses, but this is in part reflective of the difficulties presented by Census definitions until 1947. Theirs is an excellent example of a cross-disciplinary study of a particular urban issue, and unlike most of the studies above, combines an understanding of the architectural and social phenomena of flats and their tenants. Little work has been done on interwar flats in other Australian cities, although given that over 80% of Australia's purpose-built flats

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[30] Ibid, p. 73.

[31] Ibid, p. 77.

[32] Ibid, p. 78.

[33] P. Spearritt, *Sydney Since the Twenties*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1978, Ch. 4, 'Depression and War'.

[34] J. Gregory and R. Taylor, '"The Slums of Tomorrow"?'.

[35] Ibid, p. 84.

counted in 1947 were in New South Wales and Victoria, and within those states, largely in Sydney and Melbourne, this is hardly surprising.[36]

Flats and apartments in other Anglo-Saxon cities have also been extensively written about in recent years. A large study of English flats was produced by John Tarn in 1974, although this was restricted to nineteenth century London only.[37] He traced the development of flats from the model working class tenements built in the 1840s, to the large luxury blocks built in the West End, Kensington and around Victoria Station, from the 1850s onward. Tarn concluded his argument by suggesting that flats were never particularly popular with the English, mainly because they were 'foreign', and even as he was writing in the 1970s the flat was 'still regarded as an aberration if not actually evil' by many in Britain.[38] Chris Hamnett and Bill Randolph studied London's purpose-built flats erected in the period from the mid-nineteenth century to almost the present, and produced figures that show that in the interwar period, London went through a flat-building boom, in which 'over 1,300 new blocks of flats containing over 56,000 flats were built'. They attribute this huge growth to the attractiveness of residential investments in the Depression-period combining with the rapid increase in demand for dwellings created by the rapid increase in small households in the 1930s.[39]

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[36] *Census*, 1947.

[37] J. Tarn, 'French Flats'.

[38] Ibid, p. 38.

[39] C. Hamnett and B. Randolph, 'The Rise and Fall of London's Purpose-Built Blocks of Privately Rented Flats: 1853–1983', *London Journal*, 11, (2) 1985, p. 162; See also their later *Cities, Housing and Profits: flat break-up and the decline of private renting*, Hutchinson, London, 1988; An earlier study of Edwardian and interwar suburban flats can be found in A. Jackson, *Semi-Detached London: Suburban Development, Life and Transport, 1900–1939*, Allen and Unwin, London, pp. 36, 135–6; A pioneering study of English flats was produced in 1936 by an architect, H. Ingham Ashworth. He claimed his book was designed to bring to the attention of 'architects, surveyors, builders, engineers, estate agents, building promoters, in fact all who are interested in flats a comprehensive idea of the essentials to be considered in any proposed scheme of development'. He argued that the rapid growth in the number of flats in London was threatening to undermine their acceptance, and that his book hoped to avert this happening. See H. Ingham Ashworth, *Flats: Design and Equipment*, Pitman and Sons, London, 1936, p. vii.

There is also a vast literature on apartments in the USA, although most of it concentrates on the experiences of the major cities of the east coast and midwest, especially New York, Boston and Chicago. The studies are almost always architecturally-focussed, and tend to examine the early period of apartment development and the attempts by citizens and legislatures to control or ban them.[40] A major exception is Michael Doucet and John Weaver's study which examined the development of apartments across America as part of their wider study of North American housing. They trace the development of these places across time, and roughly divide their study between the periods 1900–1940 and 1960 to the 1980s. They examine the apartment market in detail looking at the role of developers, zoning laws, investment advisers, tenants and the architectural conventions involved.[41] In an interesting section, they also trace the development of what they call the 'psychological factors' associated with apartment living, and the attempts in the 1960s and 1970s by developers and promoters to appeal to both a sense of respectability among middle-class apartment-dwellers, while at the same time stressing the freedom and lifestyle apartments offered to American youth.[42] This has been a fine-line that promoters have also had to tread when marketing flats in Australian cities.

The very ubiquity of apartments in New York has led to them being extensively studied over the years. For the social historian, however, these studies suffer from

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[40] For a wide-ranging but not in-depth study of the attempts across the USA to ban apartments see Kenneth Baar, 'The National Movement to Halt the Spread of Multifamily Housing, 1890–1926', *American Planning Association Journal*, 39, Winter 1992, pp. 39–48; On the history and development of apartments see, R. Sexton (ed), *American Apartment Houses of Today: Illustrations Plans, Details, Exteriors and Interiors of Modern City and Suburban Apartment Houses Throughout the United States*, Architectural Book Publishing Co, New York, 1926; J. Hancock, 'The apartment house in urban America' in A. King (ed), *Building and Society: Essays on the social development of the built environment*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1980. King defines five types of American apartments, ranging from the 'palatial' to the most common which are small 'efficiency' apartments, 'compact one-to five-room units in small walk-up buildings several stories high', p. 171. 'Efficiency' apartments are the nearest equivalent the USA has to most of Melbourne's blocks, being small, central, and often built on a single house block. Most of those built from the 1920s at least, have some space for car parking; L. Ford, 'Multiunit housing in the American city', *Geographical Review*, 76, (1986), pp. 390–407.

[41] M. Doucet and J. Weaver, 'The North American Apartment Building as a Matter of Business and an Expression of Culture: A Survey and Case Study, 1950s–1980s', Ch. 9 of their *Housing the North American City*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1991.

the same problems as many of those in Melbourne, in that most of them reflect on the architecture of the buildings rather than the people within. Andrew Alpern appears to have made something of a living out of being an expert on New York's luxury apartments. He has produced *Apartments for the Affluent*, an architectural guide to these apartments, and *Luxury Apartment Houses of Manhattan: An Illustrated History*, which is an updated and broader version of the earlier book.[43] Both have a strong architectural flavour, although the latter does have two introductory chapters that establish the history and development of New York's luxury apartments, beginning with the Stuyvesant in 1870.[44] Elizabeth Collins Cromley attempted to use social history to 'broaden the concerns and interpretive abilities of architectural history' in her study of New York's early apartments. She did this in order to see apartment buildings in their broader historical framework, and therefore reconstruct, 'the attitudes, positions, preferences, experiments, and apartment design solutions that went into creating a new American building type'.[45] As part of this process, she described the difficulties New Yorkers had in adjusting to the new social manners apartment living required. Chief among these was the need for developers and promoters of apartment living to convince them that an apartment was actually a home and not simply a house for transient tenants. Cromley argues, however, that by the 1870s, with apartments becoming more and more the norm, and indeed the only option for people who either needed or wanted to remain in the city, these concerns began to recede.[46] Her attempts to use social history to broaden her work are, however, overwhelmed by the strong architectural emphasis of her work, and the discussions of social aspects of apartments simply read as additions to the major focus.

[42] Ibid, pp. 414–5.

[43] A. Alpern, *Apartments for the Affluent: A Historical Survey of Buildings in New York*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1975; Also see his *Luxury Apartment Houses*; For an architectural history of New York's early apartment houses also see A. Kallman Epstein, 'Multifamily Dwellings and the Search for Respectability: Origins of the New York Apartment House', *Urbanism Past and Present*, No. 10, Vol. 5, Issue 2, Summer 1980, pp. 29–39.

[44] A. Alpern, *Luxury Apartment Houses*, Ch. 1, 'Introduction' and Ch. 2, Antecedents of American apartments: The origins of apartments'.

[45] E. Collins Cromley, *Alone Together*, p. 9.

[46] Ibid, esp. Ch. 4, 'At Home in the First Apartment Houses'.

The Chicago History Group published a series of articles on the social and architectural history of that city's apartments in the late 1970s and early 1980s, although again there is a strong emphasis on the architectural aspects of these buildings. Celia Hilliard wrote of the grand apartments and apartment buildings built along Chicago's Gold Coast in the period from the early twentieth century up to the Depression, while Wim de Wit explored the influence of the 'Prairie School' on the design of Chicago's low-rise apartments.[47] Carroll William Westfall, on the other hand, has traced the development of tall buildings, and their use as residences and investments by the city's wealthy from the 1870s to the present.[48]

Apartments in some of the major cities of Canada have also been studied in the last decade or so. In particular, Toronto's interwar apartments have been closely examined by historical geographer, Richard Dennis. Like Melbourne, Toronto was traditionally a city dominated by single-family homes, and a rather severe dissenting Protestant ethos. According to Dennis, civic leaders and residents didn't take kindly to apartment buildings when they first began to appear early this century.[49] Apartments were seen in the same light as tenements, which, given Toronto's large Scottish community, were equated with the slums of Edinburgh and Glasgow, and thus to be avoided in 'Toronto the Good'. Apartments were also considered to be too closely associated with Continental Europe, most notably France, and therefore linked in Protestant Toronto minds with public rather than private culture, and more dangerously, sexual immorality. Dennis's work encompasses social history, geography, architecture and nomenclature. My work

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[47] C. Hilliard, '"Rent Reasonable to Right Parties": Gold Coast Apartment Buildings 1906–1929', *Chicago History*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Summer 1979, pp. 66–77; W. de Wit, 'Apartment Houses and Bungalows: Building the Flat City', *Chicago History*, Vol. 12, No. 4, Winter 1983–4, pp. 19–29.

[48] C. Westfall, 'Homes at the Top: Domesticating Chicago's Tall Apartment Buildings', *Chicago History*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Spring 1985, pp. 20–39.

[49] R. Dennis, *Toronto's First Apartment-House Boom*; See also his 'Interpreting the apartment house'; and 'Apartment Housing in Canadian Cities, 1900–1940'.

is heavily influenced by his, especially his use of rate books and municipal guides to trace the locations, owners and tenants of flats.[50]

The development of flats and apartments in Melbourne was part of a trend to more communal styles of living across the English-speaking world in the early years of this century. Flats were built in response to increasing demands for relatively compact, but fully self-contained accommodation for individuals and groups whose dwelling needs were not catered for by the single-family house. In most places these included single women, bachelors, childless and/or elderly couples and widows, who for various reasons to be discussed below became an important sub-set of the housing market in the early years of this century. The generally negative reactions flats and flat-dwellers attracted in these Anglo-Saxon-based countries is indicative of the strength of the belief in the 'idea of the home' in these societies. The rest of this thesis involves a discussion of the flats built in Melbourne in the prewar period, who they were built for and by whom, and the range of reactions they attracted. To begin the discussion and to locate flats in their social and geographical context the following section will detail the numbers and locations of flats around the city.

Melbourne's Flats: The Numbers

Flats are overwhelmingly a twentieth century phenomenon in Melbourne. Flats were not counted in the census of 1901, and only 1,362 flats and tenements were counted in Melbourne and its suburbs ten years later in 1911 (See Table 3). It can be fairly safely assumed that the vast majority of these were non-self-contained dwellings in private houses and other buildings – the apartment houses that were

[50] R. Dennis. 'Apartment-House Boom', *passim*; The only other major English-language study of prewar Canadian apartments appears to be Murray Peterson's 'The Rise of Apartments and Apartment Dwellers in Winnipeg (1900–1914) and a Comparative Study with Toronto', *Prairie Forum*, Vol. 18, 1993, pp. 155–169; There is also, however, a survey of Montréal's apartments written in French and published in 1994. See M. Choko, 'Le 'Boom' des Immeubles à Appartements à Montréal de 1921 à 1951',, *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine*, Vol. XXIII, (1994), pp. 3–18.

to become the subject of much debate in the interwar years.[51] Unfortunately no breakdown of the number of people who lived in this type of accommodation was given in this or the following censuses, although the 1921 *Census* does give a far more detailed analysis of dwelling figures. That year a total of 8,743 flats and tenements were counted, representing about 5.5% of the metropolitan area's total dwelling stock. A quarter of these (2,194) were in the City of Melbourne alone, while another 2,700-odd were in the three inner southern suburbs of Prahran, South Melbourne and St Kilda (See Table 4). It is likely that the majority of these dwellings were converted former mansions or large terrace houses, providing accommodation that included perhaps a living room, bedroom and a small kitchenette, but rarely a self-contained bathroom. It is known that by 1921 Melbourne did have some purpose-built flats, but it is unlikely that anything of the order of this magnitude was in existence so early.[52]

Table 3: Flats and Tenements in Melbourne 1911–1947.

Year	Flats/Tens	% Pop	% Dwellings	Flats
1911	1362	na	1.2	na
1921	8743	na	5.5	na
1933	15002	3.85	6.2	na
1947	32568	6.4	10.5	21242 (6.8%)

Source: *Census* 1911–1947.

At the 1933 *Census* a change in definition of what constituted a flat or tenement appears to have occurred and distorted the figures for the City of Melbourne, but not in other municipal districts. Just over 15,000 flats and tenements were counted across the metropolitan area with huge increases in numbers in Prahran and St Kilda, as would be expected given the well-documented flat building booms there in the 1920s and early 1930s.[53] But in contrast, the City of Melbourne recorded a

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[51] Until 1947 no differentiation was made between flats that were self-contained (that is flats which had their own kitchen and bathroom), and tenements, which were essentially non-self-contained flats, usually converted from existing houses, and involved the sharing of a bathroom and/or kitchen with other tenant/s.

[52] Terry Sawyer details some of these early blocks in his 'Residential Flats in Melbourne'.

[53] Ibid; S. Wilde, *The History of Prahran*, pp. 61–65; A. Longmire, *St Kilda*, p. 61.

reduction of almost 500 of these types of dwellings, mainly because as discussed in Chapter Three, these had been redefined as boarding and lodging houses for no apparent reason. The 1933 *Census* also recorded for the first time the number of residents living in flats and tenements across the metropolitan area – 38,238 or 3.85% of the population. Unfortunately no regional breakdowns in population were given, although St Kilda's 3,724 flats and tenements had an average of 2.57 inmates, meaning that 9,570 of its 46,579 people – 20.5% – lived in this type of accommodation.[54]

The 1947 figures for flats and tenements show up the full effects of the 1930s flat-building boom, but are also perhaps a little distorted by the War and Depression-induced housing shortage. This shortage led to owners of large houses deciding to sub-divide them into flats for a quick profit and/or to accommodate family or friends who had moved home or to the city for war work. The 32,568 flats and tenements counted represented 10.5% of all private dwellings across Melbourne. But they were highly concentrated in the inner southern and eastern suburbs. Over a quarter (8,448) were in St Kilda alone. Other sizeable concentrations were found in the Cities of Melbourne (6,443), Prahran (4,902) and South Melbourne (2,761). Large numbers were also beginning to appear in places in the inner east such as Hawthorn (1,924), and in the more suburban Caulfield (1,298, up from 772 in 1933) and Brighton (968). The numbers of flat and tenement dwellers and their proportion of the population virtually doubled between 1933 and 1947 rising to 78,354 and 6.4% respectively. Evidence of the housing shortage is confirmed by the finding that 33,603 houses – over 10% – were listed as being shared by two or more families effectively doubling- and tripling-up in non-self-contained dwellings in 1947.

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[54] *Census* 1933.

Table 4: Major Locations of Flats and Tenements 1921–1947

Municipality	1921	1933	1947
Brighton	114	500	968
Caulfield	300	772	1298
Hawthorn	378	1090	1924
Malvern	391	817	1301
Melbourne	2194	1702	6443
Prahran	845	2387	4902
Sth Melbourne	816	945	2761
St Kilda	958	3724	8448
Total (Melb)	8743	15002	32568

Source: *Census* 1921–1947.

The 1947 *Census* included a breakdown between flats and tenements for the first time (See Table 5). Of the more than 32,500 flats and tenements counted across the city, two-thirds or 21,242 were self-contained flats, representing 6.8% of all dwellings. But again, their geographical distribution was uneven and reflected the socio-economic profile of different districts. In St Kilda 70% of the combined total were flats and only 30% tenements. These self-contained flats also represented close to 35% of all St Kilda's private dwellings. In Prahran the flats versus tenement figures were similar (65%–35%), and flats accounted for just under 20% of all dwellings.[55] In more working-class areas such as Fitzroy, on the other hand, tenements overwhelmingly predominated, accounting for over 80% of the combined total there. In the City of Melbourne (MCC) the figures were more even, with 40% flats and 60% tenements, but the figures for different areas within the city skewed this figure.[56] Self-contained flats made up 11.5% of the MCC's dwelling stock in 1947, but the distribution of these was not evenly spread. A survey of MCC *Rate Books* for 1945, for instance shows that the council's Albert Ward, which took in most of East Melbourne and South Yarra below Punt Road, contained ninety per cent of the MCC area's purpose-built flats. Most of the rest of these flats were in Parkville and similar middle-class enclaves within the city.

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[55] *Census* 1947.

[56] Victorian *Year-Book*, *1946–7*, pp. 456–7. Note that these figures include flats that were shared by two or more households. No further breakdown was provided to show how many fitted this description, although my guess is not many.

Tenements were mostly found in Carlton, North Carlton, Flemington, North Melbourne, and similar working class areas.[57]

Table 5: Major Locations of Self-contained Flats 1947

Municipality	Number of Flats
Brighton	806
Caulfield	1078
Hawthorn	1422
Malvern	973
Melbourne	2627
Prahran	3197
Sth Melbourne	1107
St Kilda	5965
Total (Melbourne)	21242

Source: *Census* 1947

As it did with boarding and guest houses, the yearly Sands and McDougall's *Directory of Victoria* provided an opportunity for owners of blocks of flats to advertise their existence. The category 'Flats' first appeared in the *Directory* in 1920 in the 'Melbourne Professional and Trades' section. Various blocks of flats had appeared in the general streets section before this time, with Melbourne Mansions in Collins St, Melbourne's earliest purpose-built flat block, appearing from the time of its opening in 1906. It made its first appearance as a business in 'Flats' section in 1920. Non purpose-built flats also appeared in this section. One major example was Cliveden Mansions, the converted former home of Sir Rupert Clarke in East Melbourne which became apartments in 1911.[58] Another notable inclusion in 1920 was Eden Mansions, the former Eden Terrace in Dalgety Street, St Kilda which had been converted into twenty-four flats by the bookmaker Sol Green during and just after the First World War.[59] Fifty-six blocks were listed in this first classification. St Kilda with twenty-one had the highest individual tally.

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[57] Calculated from MCC *Rate Books*, 1945–6, PROV, VPRS 5708 Unit 121; See also S. O'Hanlon, 'Flat Life in Melbourne: A Social and Historical Survey of Melbourne's Prewar Flats', in T. Dingle (ed), *The Australian City: Future/Past*, pp. 105–111.

[58] T. Sawyer, 'Residential Flats in Melbourne', p. 27–8.

[59] Tim Hubbard Pty Ltd, 'Eden Terrace 4–18 Dalgety St, St Kilda', Submission to the Classifications Committee of the Historic Buildings Council on behalf of the City of St Kilda, November/December 1989, p. 15

South Yarra had twelve blocks listed, and St Kilda Road's transition from individual mansion houses to multiple accommodation buildings was also shown in its four flat blocks – three of which were at the St Kilda Junction end of the road.[60]

The phenomenal growth in flats throughout the 1920s is reflected in the Sands and McDougall's entries, although the numbers listed do not correspond with those in the Census counts above. In 1930 over 600 individual blocks were listed across Melbourne, with 186 in the City of St Kilda alone. This source corroborates the tendency, noted above, for Melbourne's flats to be highly concentrated geographically. Over 85% of the listed flat blocks (522) were located south of the Yarra, and almost half (45%) in one municipality, St Kilda. St Kilda and Queens Roads had twenty-one blocks between them and South Yarra and Toorak 107. The inner east was the other major centre of concentration with sixty-eight blocks (11% of the total), thirty-one of which were in East Melbourne and twenty-three in Hawthorn. Over 97% of blocks listed in 1930 were therefore either in the inner south or the inner east.[61] Strangely, given the large number of flats built in the 1930s, this classification was wound down from the early part of the decade, until it regularly only listed Cliveden Mansions. The classification was discontinued completely in the 1940s.[62]

The names attached to the blocks listed in Sands and McDougall's *Directory* are indicative of the status and perception of flats in Melbourne. The very earliest were designated as 'mansions' or 'courts' in the British tradition, possibly in an attempt to denote their status as 'homes'.[63] Richard Dennis's study of Toronto's apartments notes that developers there used these names as a means of

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[60] Sands and McDougall's, *Directory of Victoria*, 1920.

[61] Ibid, 1930.

[62] Ibid, 1930–1950.

[63] For a discussion of the names of early British flats see J. Tarn, 'French Flats'; and C. Hamnett and B. Randolph, 'The Rise and Fall', p.161; Graeme Davison has also discussed the use of bucolic-sounding house names in colonial Melbourne to designate the tranquillity, peace and status of suburbia. See G. Davison, *Marvellous Melbourne*, p. 138.

'establishing status and distancing the new buildings from tenements'.[64] The names also helped to differentiate these buildings from any taint of bohemianism and immorality associated with their 'Continental' origins.[65] The same imperative appears to have operated in Melbourne. In the 1920 Sands and McDougall's listing of flats, eight blocks were designated as 'mansions', five as 'house', and two as 'courts'. Most of these were self-contained flats within converted single-family mansions in St Kilda, Toorak, South Yarra, and East Melbourne. Blocks of self-contained flats converted from former terraces were also designated 'mansions' and 'courts' in this early period. As we saw earlier Eden Terrace in St Kilda, for instance became Eden Mansions in 1917–19, while in the same suburb, Grosvenor Terrace in Grosvenor Street, became Grosvenor Mansions when it was converted into flats in 1919.[66] In 1928, the *Australian Home Beautiful* documented the conversion of a three-house terrace in George Street, East Melbourne into the Georgian Court flats.[67]

The other early influence was American. The high-life of New York was perhaps exemplified by the Waldorf, while the exotic of the mid-west was represented by Hiawatha, located incongruously in St Kilda/Windsor. The major influence, however, appears to have been names evocative of locations in the south and west of the USA. The blocks, Florida and Pasadena for example, were to be found on St Kilda Road and were perhaps designed to reflect images of the relative informality, sunshine and hedonism popularly associated with those places. The use of these names perhaps suggests that developers of flats presented them to the public as representing a new form of living in the more informal postwar era. The name Pasadena was also symbolic of the then newly-emerging paradigm of Los Angeles as the exemplar of the 'good life' in the western world. This concept was pushed further in the mid-1920s when Hollywood was built further down St Kilda

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[64] R. Dennis, 'Interpreting the Apartment House', p. 316.

[65] In New York developers did exactly the opposite, using French names to conjure up images of European sophistication. See A. Alpern, *Luxury Apartment Houses*, p. 3.

[66] Tim Hubbard Pty Ltd, *Eden Terrace*, p. 14.

[67] *Australian Home Beautiful*, November 1928.

Road, perhaps in an attempt to cash in on the glamour of the rapidly-expanding film industry.

By the 1930s the names of flat blocks reflected a more cosmopolitan outlook. Names such as 'mansions' or 'house', or 'court' remained popular, as in Dale Court in Prahran, and Hampton Court in Hampton, but just as often blocks were simply given a standard name, sometimes the same as the mansion house that formerly existed on the site. Royal names were popular, as in Kyng's Keepe and Royal Court in Parkville, but a touch of Australian independence and federal fervour may have been shown in the late 1930s decision to name a large block of twenty-four flats in Toorak Road, South Yarra, Yarralumla after the Governor-General's residence in recently established Canberra. The beach theme was particularly noticeable in St Kilda and Elwood. The former featured The Pacific and The Atlantic in Grey Street, while the latter had The Grange and Bluff Mansions in Barkly Street.[68]

A feature of the names of flats in the 1930s was the attempt to evoke the sophistication of Continental Europe rather than cover-up the possible associations with, say, French bohemianism and vice, as had previously been the case. Sometimes these names coincided with the beach theme, as in The Riviera in Brighton, or San Remo and Venezia Court in St Kilda. More common, however, was the use of French or Italian names evoking cities, towns and resorts in those countries or in Switzerland. Thus Clairvaux was in St Kilda, Lisieux in Armadale, and Florence Mansions and St Moritz in Elwood. Also common were Spanish names such as El Toyar in Malvern, Santa Fe in Elwood and Valencia in East Malvern, all of which perhaps conjure up images of both Europe and the USA. The appeal to seaside or holiday themes was also strong: Summerland Mansions and Sur La Mer could be found in St Kilda, Beacholme in Elwood, and Palm in Malvern.[69] But the appeal of exotic America, as represented by both jazz-age New York and the California of the film industry remained the major influence on

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[68] Sands and McDougall's, 1920–1930; MCC and St Kilda *Rate Books*, 1930–1945
[69] Ibid.

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block names in the 1930s, and became stronger in the years leading up to the war. Examples included a second Hollywood in Elwood, San Jose in Hawthorn, Brooklyn in Elwood and Toorak and Miami in Elwood.

Early Flats

Melbourne's first block of purpose-built flats was probably Gordon House in Little Bourke Street, built in 1884 by the entrepreneur George Coppin and some associates, including the Reverend Charles Strong. 'Originally known as "Coppin's Improved Lodgings and Dwellings"', these flats were mainly aimed at working-class families and were built along the lines of the British 'Peabody' buildings, following the 'philanthropy and five per cent' model.[70] Graeme Davison argues that the scheme was not popular with those for whom it was intended, who much preferred to reside in their own detached houses in the suburbs. The building quickly became a down-market lodging house for single men, and remained as such until the early 1980s when it was renovated into a hotel. Gordon House, as a lodging house, is therefore really outside the bounds of this study.[71]

The first avowedly middle-class block was Melbourne Mansions at 91–101 Collins Street, built as an investment by David Syme of the *Age* newspaper, and completed in 1906 (Illustration 19).[72] Melbourne Mansions was designed by the architects Inskip and Butler of Collins Street, who appear to have researched these types of flats interstate and overseas on behalf of Syme before finalising their plans and proposals. They sent a letter to Syme in 1905 which set out a series of suggestions and plans, as well as questions about what services were proposed to be included in the block. These questions included whether rents would include the use of electricity, gas and other services, catering, and furnishings etc. David

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[70] Oakford Australia Ltd, *Gordon Place 110 Years 1884–1994*, Melbourne, 1994.

[71] G. Davison, *Marvellous Melbourne*, p. 141;

[72] T. Sawyer, 'Residential Flats in Melbourne', p. 6; Syme Family Papers, 'Documents and papers re Properties other than the Age Business', File: '"Melbourne Mansions" Correspondence', Series V, SLV MS 9751/909–1011, Box 11904/4.

Syme also appears to have researched flats in Sydney and elsewhere before finalising his plans. A letter to Syme held in the State Library of Victoria's 'Melbourne Mansions' file from a Charles Turner details the plans and management of three apartment buildings in Sydney – the Albany and Cromer flats, and Cecil Chambers. None were totally self-contained, and all came with servants and meals provided as part of the rent. Another report in the same file details the facilities and services provided by some large blocks in London, including Whitehall Court and Eaton Mansions. Again, these provided some meals and servants to residents who desired them. The file unfortunately doesn't provide evidence of how much these reports influenced the final design and management of the building.[73]

As it turned out, Melbourne Mansions was a five storey neo-classical building that included medical rooms in the basement and ground floors, a guest lounge and common dining-room on the ground floor, and twenty-five flats on the ground and upper floors. 'Suites', as the flats were called, varied in size from two-to-six-rooms, and some came with kitchens, although residents could also choose to dine in the common dining room, or have meals prepared in the common kitchen and sent up to their suites. All suites had bathrooms, and the larger ones came with provision for a servant's room. All were rented and tenants could make use of a group of shared servants. One flat per floor was available to be let out as single rooms, or could be let as a five-room flat for one household. It was equipped with a bathroom, but had no kitchen. In 1906 prices per annum ranged from ninety-six pounds for a two-room suite without kitchen, to three-hundred pounds for a six-room first floor suite overlooking Collins Street. Single rooms could be had on each floor for between forty-five and fifty-two pounds.[74]

From the outset, Melbourne Mansions was home to a select group of the city's wealthy elite. Soon after the complex opened, the public were afforded a glimpse

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[73] Letter to Syme from Chas. Turner, 2 March 1905; Letter to D. Syme from Inskip and Butler, December 1904, '"Melbourne Mansions" Correspondence'.

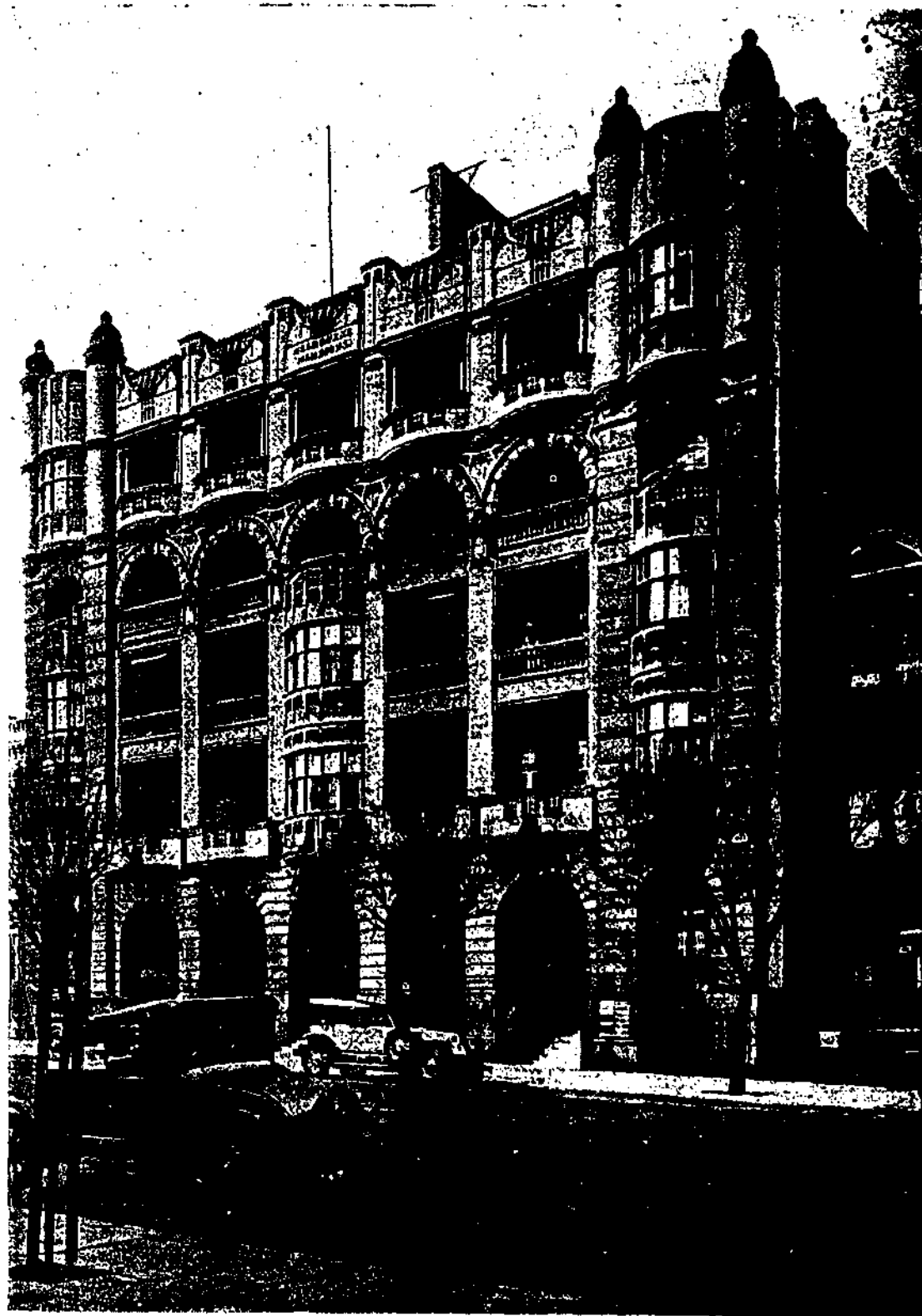[74] Syme Family Papers, File: 'Geoffrey Syme Notebook', Box 1184/7.

Illustration 19: Melbourne Mansions, Collins Street, Melbourne.
Source: *Australian Home Beautiful*, 1 October 1927.

Illustration 20: Cliveden Mansions, Wellington Parade, East Melbourne.
Source: *Australian Home Beautiful*, 1 October 1927.

Illustration 21: Amesbury House, Domain Road, South Yarra.

of their lifestyles by the writer of the 'Ladies Letter' column in *Table Talk*. She described a flat in the building as likely to become known as the most 'beautifully-appointed' in Melbourne. The flat was rented by a bachelor, and represented 'one of the very best suites of the luxurious Melbourne Mansions'. The bachelor was said to be renovating the flat using autumnal colours to provide a 'peculiarly restful and soothing' environment that was the envy of many women around town.[75] In 1911 Evelyn Clowes described Melbourne Mansions as the best available flats in the city, 'beautifully appointed and proportionally dear'.[76]

Similar pre-1914 blocks around Melbourne included Whitehall in Bank Place in the City, which was purpose-built as flats in 1906, and Alexandra Mansions in Aitken Street, South Melbourne which was converted from a factory/warehouse in 1912.[77] Fawkner Mansions in Punt Road, South Yarra, completed in 1910 is probably the first purpose-built block of flats erected outside the central Melbourne area.[78] Another early block was Cliveden Mansions in East Melbourne (Illustration 20). This was not strictly a block of flats, as it was the conversion and extension of the former Clarke family home at the corner of Wellington Parade and Clarendon Street into a combination boarding house-cum-private hotel. At Cliveden Mansions residents do not appear to have rented out particular flats, but took a series of rooms, to create a 'suite', as boarding house tenants did. Nor did they have their own kitchens. Rather, they ate in a communal dining room, again much like at Melbourne Mansions, or in boarding houses. Also, as with Melbourne Mansions, tenants were able to share servants.[79] But in most contemporary discussions of Cliveden Mansions it was referred to as flats, and was seen as heralding a new type of living arrangement in Melbourne.

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[75] *Table Talk*, 30 August 1906.

[76] E. Clowes, *On the Wallaby*, p. 118.

[77] T. Sawyer, 'Residential Flats in Melbourne', p. 27.

[78] See T. Sawyer, Ibid, for a discussion of the earliest flats in Melbourne; Miles Lewis argues the case for Fawkner Mansions being the first outside central Melbourne, 'Historical Introduction', p. 38; A perusal of MCC Rate Books suggests that residents at Whitehall appear to have selected rooms to combine into suites.

[79] T. Sawyer, 'Residential Flats in Melbourne', p. 27–8.

What Cliveden Mansions, and to a certain extent Melbourne Mansions and the other early flat-blocks represented, was the coming to Melbourne of what were known in Britain and America as 'apartment hotels'. Large palatial hotels began to appear in American cities in the 1820s and 1830s, and from the outset, 'large numbers of people, including entire families, lived all year round in them'.[80] But from the 1850s specialised palatial apartment hotels in which residents would rent suites – sometimes of multiple floors – were increasingly built for the very rich. Residents would buy all services, including food, personal and other help, just as in a hotel, but would have a permanent, or semi-permanent tenancy, as if in an apartment. In America, according to Paul Groth, the 'heyday of residential life in palace hotels occurred in between 1870 and 1945'.[81] The most expensive of these American apartment hotels catered to a wealthy elite who found the convenience and service of a suite in a hotel preferable to the costs and difficulties of maintaining a large house in a time of servant shortages. Groth argues that the very wealthiest of the business elite would maintain suites in a series of hotels and resorts across the country, moving according to whim. Their comparatively few household – as opposed to personal – possessions would be moved from place to place with them by a small group of servants employed for the purpose.[82]

Residents of Melbourne Mansions and Cliveden Mansions could take advantage of in-house servants who provided meals and services too tiresome to provide for oneself. As we have seen, meals could be provided either privately or in a dining-room, and the establishment would also provide more personal servants. Residents of Melbourne Mansions and the other early blocks were taking advantage of the convenience offered by flats. But they were probably also actively aping the lifestyles of their brethren overseas, as well as flouting the dominant values of the Anglo-Australian middle-class. As with their British and American counterparts it

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[80] M. Girouard, *Cities and People*, p. 302.

[81] P. Groth, *Living Downtown*, p. 40; In 1929 Randolph Sexton updated his earlier apartment book to include apartment hotels. See R. Sexton, *American Apartment Houses, Hotels, and Apartment Hotels of Today*, Architectural Book Publishing Co, New York, 1929.

[82] P. Groth, *Living Downtown*, p. 48.

is likely that, much to the chagrin of some political and religious commentators, many of them saw themselves as above these petty concerns. It is this concern, I would suggest, that prompted Menzies' comment in his 'Forgotten People' speech about 'petty gossip' in 'so-called fashionable suburbs', and the distaste he and his people felt towards members of the upper-middle-class. Judith Brett argues that his classification of society rejects the Marxist notion of a three-class society comprising the rich, the middle and the poor 'into a two-part scheme with the rich and the organised poor together in the same category as idle, spineless leaners', while the middle-class are seen as the 'active, dynamic class'.[83] The rich, living their apparently bohemian existence in flats and hotels were no better than the 'unproductive' working-class below.

The rich probably didn't care about the values of the lower-middle-class. They stayed in flats and apartment hotels because they were convenient and fashionable. For the very rich, they were also taking the place of boarding houses as convenient places to stay while in the city. Melbourne's social set would use these places for short and long term stays, especially during the social season, or when 'in town' on business or pleasure. Each week *Table Talk* announced who had taken or left suites in these places, just as they would announce who was staying in certain boarding houses or hotels. In 1910, for instance, 'Mr and Mrs Truby Williams' were said to have 'taken a flat at Melbourne Mansions', after having been away from Melbourne 'for over five years'.[84] A year later 'Mr and Mrs A Douglas Menzies' were said to 'have left the Menzies Hotel and taken a flat at the Melbourne Mansions'.[85] Similarly in 1916, *Table Talk's* 'social page' noted that 'Mr and Mrs Charles McEvoy have given up their flat at Cliveden Mansions, and, accompanied by their daughter, have left for England'.[86]

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[83] J. Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*, p. 44.

[84] *Table Talk*, 21 April 1910.

[85] Ibid, 1 June 1911.

[86] Ibid, 28 January 1916; It is interesting to note that during this period *Table Talk* would often refer to suites in boarding houses as 'flats', perhaps suggesting that the term gained some social cachet as a result of the establishment of some of the early purpose-built blocks.

Flats in the Cities of Melbourne and St Kilda: A Profile

Municipal Rate Books allow us to pinpoint the locations and details of Melbourne's flats. To this end I have conducted a survey of the two municipalities with the largest concentration of flats in the interwar period, Melbourne (Map 2) and St Kilda (Map 3), at five year intervals from 1920 to 1945. These allow us to ascertain where these flats were, who lived in them and who owned them. These surveys will form the basis of much of the detailed information in this and the following two chapters.

In the City of Melbourne flats were not listed as separate entities in Rate Books until the mid-1920s. The 1920 books show some p' ces known to be flats, such as Melbourne Mansions and Cliveden Mansions simply as 'brick houses', usually with only one owner and occupier listed.[87] The 1925 books were the first to show flats as a separate category although again very little information was provided. Eighteen blocks were listed, all in the Albert Ward which covered South Yarra, but of these only two, Amesbury House in Domain Road (Illustration 21) and Mayfair in Marne Street were named. The Rate Books did not specify whether blocks were purpose-built or converted and it is impossible to deduce, given the lack of information available. It is known, however, that both Amesbury House and Mayfair were purpose-built, and that an unnamed block in Domain Road simply listed as being owned by the 'Executors Clapp', was the conversion of the former Clapp family home into the Endion Flats.[88] In no cases were occupiers identified, nor were numbers of rooms or flats per block recorded. Owners were listed, although addresses were not provided.[89]

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[87] In earlier years, however, warehouses and office buildings ('counting houses') were listed as being of various 'flats'. This refers to the old use of the term as number of floors as discussed above; PROV, VPRS 5708 Unit 56.

[88] 1. Oscar Slater, *Walking Tour of South Yarra West*, p. 13; *Truth*, 19 June 1926.

[89] In three cases, Amesbury House Pty Ltd, Mayfair Properties and Greylings Ltd, these were property companies. Amesbury House was, and still is, a property owned in company title by a group of individual owners. Greylings was probably also held in company share, while Mayfair appears to have been a family company associated with the Fink family from at least 1918. See letter from H. Roland Fink to Mr Dion of Gardner and Lang, SLV MS 9935 Gardner and Lang files; Company Share Title was the means of owning an individual flat before Stratum and Strata

Map 2: City of Melbourne, showing boundaries of Albert Ward.
Source: Sands and McDougall's, *Map of Melbourne and Suburbs*, 1935

In 1930 the number of entries had approximately doubled, although the listings for that year and 1935 remained vague. By the time of the 1940 survey, however, the full impact of the 1930s flat-building boom was becoming evident in the rate books. The council's clerks began to note far more details about flats, which were now usually identified by individual number, block name, and where known, individual occupier. In Albert South Ward, which took in South Yarra, Jolimont and parts of East Melbourne, 567 flats in sixty-seven blocks were listed. Across the city there were another 300 flats in 24 blocks, mainly in middle-class districts such as East Melbourne, Parkville and along Flemington Road in North Melbourne.[90]

Many of these blocks were quite large, and were notable residential landmarks in a city dominated by individual houses. Gloucester Lodge at 445 St Kilda Road, for instance, was a three-storey block containing thirty flats, while Kia Ora further along the same road, contained sixty four- and five-roomed flats arranged in two parallel three-storey blocks.[91] Thorlinda Mansions, a block of thirty-one flats was in Wellington Parade, East Melbourne near Cliveden Mansions, while Regent's Court, a block of twenty-four flats could be found around the corner in Powlett Street. In Parkville there were blocks of twenty-four, twenty-six and eighteen flats in Royal Parade. The 1940 *Rate Books* give several examples of other streets containing multiple blocks, especially in South Yarra. Toorak Road West had six purpose-built blocks, and Park Street had sixty-three flats in ten blocks. Similarly Marne Street, which was created out of the former Maritimo estate in the early

Titles were introduced in the postwar period. Individual owners would buy shares to the value of their flat in a company whose sole asset and sole reason for existence was the ownership and operation of the block. Shares to the value of a flat could be bought and sold, although title to the individual flat was not granted as it remained the property of the company. Ownership of shares would allow the individual owner to occupy a flat 'to the exclusion of all others'. Some blocks of flats are still held under Company Share Title. See I. Bremner, 'Understanding the intricacies of company share and stratum titles', *Age*, 13 May 1990; 'City Life', *Age*, 18 April 1998.

[90] There were another ninety-seven flats that may or may not have been purpose-built. It is difficult to tell for sure.

[91] PROV, VPRS 5708 Unit 83.

1920s after the death of Frederick Payne, was dominated by flats.[92] In East Melbourne multiple blocks could be found in Powlett Street and to a limited extent in Clarendon and Albert Streets.

A trend to larger blocks was noticeable in 1945, when 215 blocks were counted across the city. These new flats were those completed in the period between the completion of the 1940 survey and the banning of new building in the wake of Pearl Harbour. This growth was quite significant – 800 new flats for a total of almost 2000 – and meant there were now more than three times as many blocks as twenty years earlier. Flats now dominated some areas of the city, including most of South Yarra below Punt Road and the major roads leading into the city centre. East Melbourne also had many streets dominated by flats, including Garden Avenue, an unusual cul-de-sac off Wellington Parade near Hoddle Street whose entire building stock was flats at the end of the war.[93]

Similar trends occurred in St Kilda, where flats first appeared in these records in 1920 although they are known to have existed there since at least 1912 when the Majestic Flats were built in Fitzroy Street.[94] Listings in St Kilda's Rate Books provide more detailed information on occupiers and owners than do those of the City of Melbourne. As well as the address and size of each block, its name, and the number of occupants in each flat, St Kilda rate collectors also recorded the

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[92] Marne Street had flats at nos. 1,7, 31, 35–7, 39–41, 61–71, 4–6, 20–22, 28–30, 36–42, and 50–58. I'd like to thank Donald Dunbar for information on this estate. See his 'Residential Redevelopment', p. 23; Also see L. Oscar Slater, *Walking Tour of South Yarra West*, p. 23.

[93] PROV, VPRS 5708 Unit 121; The *Age* reported in 1938 that Garden Avenue was a 'new subdivision' off Wellington Parade, which was to get its first property – a 'residential house, or what is generally known in the United States as a rooming house, comprising individual rooms for letting with a large central lounge', *Age*, 22 November 1938.

[94] M. Lewis, 'Historical Introduction', p 39; I have tabulated flats based on the description used in the rate books. The compilers of the Rate Books designated dwellings as 'brick house', 'wood house', 'brick shop', 'brick flat' etc. My calculations on purpose-built flats are based on a variety of criteria. These include: separate flat numbers listed, the block has a name, I know it personally as a block of flats, and a certain amount of supposition. If after all of these checks, I still do not know for sure if the block is purpose-built I have designated it 'doubtful'. I have not included flats attached to shops unless the shops are included in the ground floor of a flat block, as is often the case in Fitzroy Street, parts of Carlisle Street, and various streets in the Elwood Village.
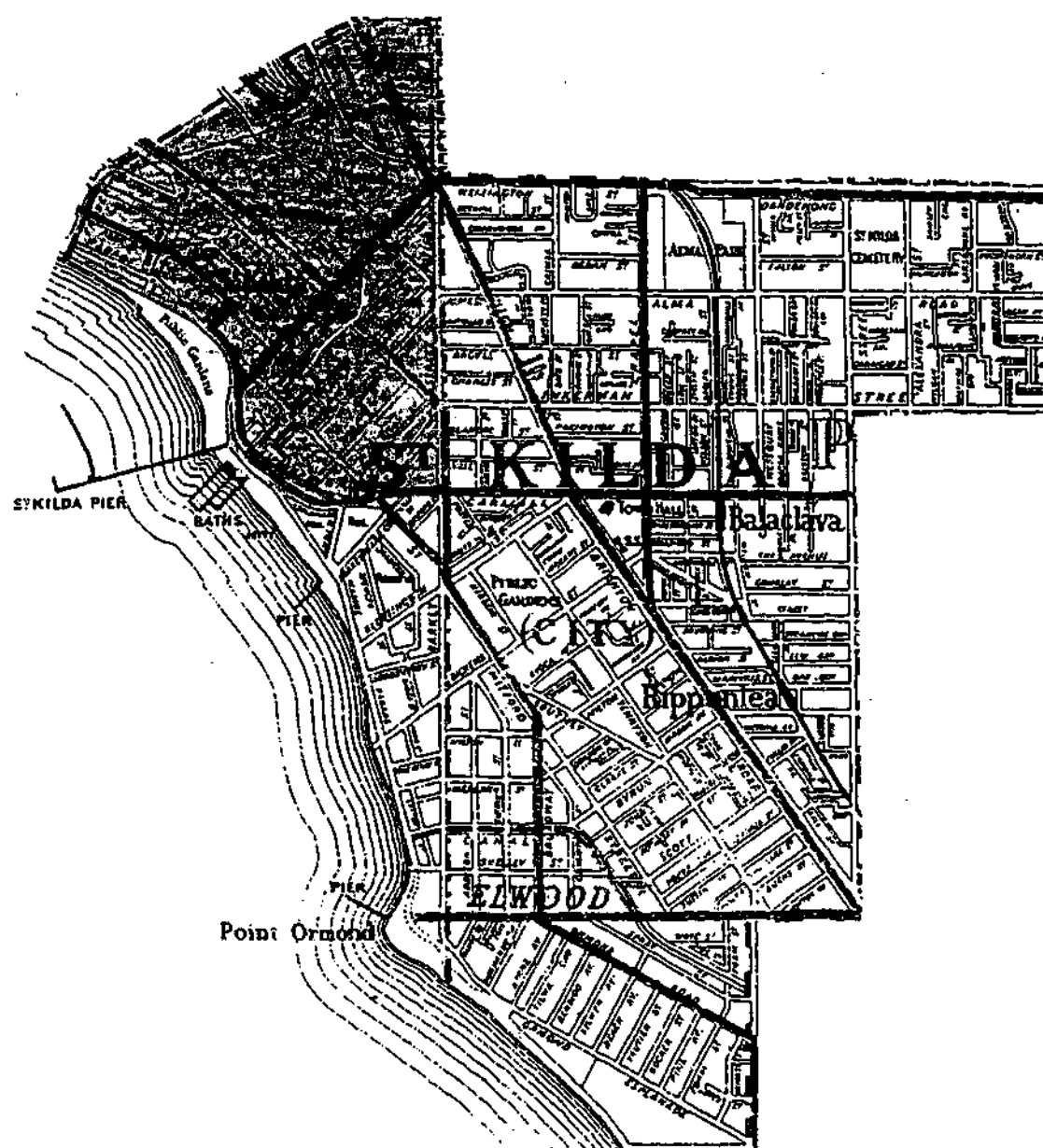
Map 3: City of St Kilda, showing boundaries of West Ward.
Source: Sands and McDougall's, *Map of Melbourne and Suburbs*, 1935.

occupation of tenants and the address of the owner, thus giving the historian more readily available information about the social profile of the flat-world there.[95]

There were 527 purpose-built flats in ninety-two blocks in St Kilda in 1920.[96] They were spread across the municipality, although the West Ward which took in the main beach area had the most – 218 flats in twenty-nine blocks. Most blocks were reasonably small, averaging only 5.8 flats, although this figure disguises quite wide variations, ranging from many blocks of three flats to the largest, Florida Mansions, a complex of thirty-one-flats in St Kilda Road owned by circus proprietor and nearby resident, George Wirth. The twenty-four-flat Eden Mansions in Dalgety Street, mentioned above, was also amongst the largest of St Kilda's blocks in 1920. Female flat-owners were represented by Miss Hermione Boldt who lived in and owned a then-unidentified block of eleven flats at seventy-six Barkly Street, near St Kilda Junction.

By 1925 the number of flats had increased by over fifty per cent to 884 in 164 blocks.[97] The largest holding was the forty-three-flat Ardoch Mansions complex, which resembled a small village, and encompassed nine apartment blocks and an old mansion arranged around a central green in Dandenong Road, East St Kilda. It was owned by a medical practitioner, Dr George Armstrong of Macquarie Street, Sydney.[98] Most other blocks ranged between two and ten flats, with many blocks of four. At seventy-six Barkly Street, the block mentioned above was identified as 'Le Chateau', and listed as being owned by Mrs Hermione Laird-Smith, who was the former Miss Hermione Boldt. It is indicative of changing attitudes that she was joined in her flat by her husband and remained as an owner-occupier after her

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[95] In the case of women occupiers and owners, they also implicitly stated marital status. Male owners and occupiers have their first and last names listed, females are designated as 'Miss' only if unmarried. Married women have no such designation, unless only initials are provided. This is not the case with males.

[96] PROV, VPRS 8816 P1 Unit 123–126. There were also a further 111 converted dwellings listed as flats and another fifty-seven of doubtful status. It should be noted that this is only about two thirds of the 958 flats and tenements listed in the 1921 *Census*, although I suspect the majority of those would be non-self-contained flats in old houses.

[97] PROV, VPRS 8816 P1 Units 143–146.

[98] Ibid, Unit 143.

marriage – eschewing the accepted practice of setting up home in a new house in the suburbs.

Between 1925 and 1930 the number of flats almost doubled to 1,679 in over 300 blocks.[99] The average number per block remained fairly steady at around 5.5, although, as in earlier years the average was higher in the West Ward, perhaps reflecting its status as the home of the more transient members of St Kilda's (and Melbourne's) population. A large block of twenty-four flats called Kingsclere, owned and occupied by Samuel Cronin was built in Fitzroy Street in 1926, which Miles Lewis has described as an 'example of flats planned around a central well in the Continental manner, which did not find acceptance in Melbourne'.[100] Also notable in 1930 was the large number of vacant flats – possibly a reflection of falling household formation as a result of the Depression, and decisions by renters to return to the family home or cheaper boarding houses as incomes and/or employment circumstances declined.

By 1935 there were over 2,800 flats in over 500 blocks.[101] The West Ward by then had more flats than the whole municipality in 1925 and Beaconsfield Parade and the Esplanade were lined with flats. In the short stretch of Beaconsfield Parade between Fitzroy Street and the municipal boundary there were nine blocks. The largest was the sixteen-flat Venezia Court – fifteen three- and four-roomed flats and a two-roomed caretaker's flat – a rather common feature of flats by this time. On the Esplanade and in Alfred Square in St Kilda proper, there were ten blocks by the middle 1930s. The strip between Robe and Acland Streets was by then virtually all flats, and contained forty-three flats in six blocks.

The tendency for smaller blocks in the narrow east-west streets of the West Ward and in the outlying wards was quite noticeable from about 1930 onwards, and is indicative of a trend noticed in the daily papers towards 'duplex' developments in

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[99] Ibid, Units 163–166.

[100] M. Lewis, 'Historical Introduction'.

[101] PROV, VPRS 8816 P1 Units 183–186

Melbourne. These were blocks of two flats, one above the other, usually with their own separate entrances, that looked like a two-storey house on its own block.[102] Some of these smaller blocks also contained three flats, either configured as a duplex on one side and an attached two storey house on the other, or two flats above or below a single floor house.[103] A writer in the *Argus* argued that these types of blocks gave 'the same privacy to the tenants as exists with the maisonette' and could be 'designed in a completely domestic style so as to not betray the fact that they are flats'. They thus 'fitted into any street, among good residences, without detracting from its homely atmosphere'.[104] In other words you could have flats without the social stigma attached to multi-unit living. Duplexes and similar blocks were quite common in East St Kilda and Elwood, perhaps suggesting that they were considered more appropriate in these more typically suburban streetscapes.

By 1940 there were just over 4,800 flats in almost 950 blocks in St Kilda, and at war's end in 1945 just short of 5,500 flats in over 1,100 blocks.[105] The major growth in flats across Melbourne therefore finished in the early years of the war, and did not really pick up again until the late 1950s.[106] The number of flats in St Kilda grew from 880-odd in 1925 to 4,800 in 1940, and subsequently by only another thousand in the following decade to 1950 as residential building ceased

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[102] The trend to duplexes in St Kilda leads to some difficulties in deciding what is a block of flats and what is simply a divided house. In most cases I have used a series of measures: where two flats of the same number of rooms are listed, I have usually assumed this to be a duplex, and hence counted the two flats, and one block in my tabulations. Where two flats of markedly different size are listed, especially within a street of single houses, I have not counted these as purpose-built flats. In many cases the duplexes also have names, and so are easier to spot.

[103] Amirah Inglis' family moved to a three-flat block at 364 Barkly Street, Elwood in the late 1930s. Her family lived in the two-storey side and let out the two flats next door. Inglis describes this property as a 'maisonette', although in most cases at that time, 'maisonette' usually referred to row houses or attached pairs. See A. Inglis, *Amirah: An Un-Australian Childhood*, p. 112.

[104] 'New Trends in Flats. Special Type for Families', *Argus*, 20 August 1936

[105] PROV, VPRS 8816 P1 Units 203–206. The average block size was just over five flats, although in the West Ward it was 7.16. The larger blocks in this Ward are shown by the average for the other wards being just under 4.5, almost three flats less.

[106] On the rapid growth of this market in the late 1950s and early 1960s see Housing Industry Research Committee, *Flats*.

during the war, and was channelled into suburban housing in the reconstruction era.

Across the inner suburbs flats either replaced former mansions that had recently been used as boarding houses, or were built in the grounds of these places, confirming the suggestion that flat living was replacing boarding as a more desirable form of accommodation for the upper-middle-class as the interwar years wore on. In St Kilda, Summerland Mansions, a block of twelve four-room flats replaced the Summerland Guest House in the early 1920s, Mandalay Flats were built in the front garden of Mandalay on the Esplanande, which continued as a guest house, and some of the land surrounding Inverleith in Acland Street was sold off and developed as Durham, Inverleith Court and Inverleith Mansions. Similarly, Elijah Thomas built a block of six four-room flats behind his guest house in Enfield Street, while the grounds of Eildon in Grey Street were subdivided to create Eildon Road which contained multiple blocks of flats by the late 1930s.[107] Brookwood Guest House in Queens Road was replaced by Brookwood Flats in 1936, and in Toorak and South Yarra several blocks of new flats took on the name of the mansion/boarding house they abutted or replaced.[108]

Conclusion

Flats, therefore, became a common form of dwelling in Melbourne in the interwar years. But as they became more ubiquitous, their opponents became more vocal in their denunciations of what they called the 'flat-evil'. Many architects and architectural commentators were especially enthusiastic in their support of flats as an obvious solution to the housing needs of many non-family groups, but other groups strongly denounced them as anti-human, anti-family, and un-Australian. The majority of Melburnians, however, probably had no strong opinion either for or against. For them, I suspect, flats were considered dwelling options not to their

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[107] PROV, VPRS 8816 P1 Units 163–166; *Australian Home Beautiful (AHB)*, September 1933.
[108] Herald, 15 April 1936; *AHB*, January 1925; Examples in South Yarra and Toorak include Trawalla Court flats next door to the Trawalla mansion, and Stanhope Flats, built on the site of the

taste or budget. Tenants of flats also probably had no real opinions either way. To them flats simply represented a convenient form of accommodation that was becoming increasingly available and acceptable in the interwar years. The following two chapters will concentrate on the owners and tenants (and in some cases owner-occupiers) of flats, in order to find out who these people were and why they lived in, or invested in flats. These chapters will also examine the reactions of some of the critics of flats to determine how closely their image of the 'flat world' reflected both the self-image of flat-dwellers, and the reality of their lived experience.

former Stanhope mansion in Toorak Road.

Chapter Seven

Flats, Tenants and their Supporters and Critics

Introduction

From the time of the opening of Melbourne Mansions in 1906, flat-living had its defenders and critics. Those in favour of higher-density living saw the coming of flats to Melbourne as evidence of an increasing sophistication and worldliness in the city, and as rational reactions to the dwelling needs of people for whom the single family home was inappropriate. Defenders of what they saw as Australian values felt the same, but did not see this as a good thing. They regarded flats and flat-dwellers with intense suspicion, believing they led unusual lives, outside the mainstream of Australia society. To a certain extent they were right, and flats did attract some bohemians and non-conformists. But the most unusual thing about most flat tenants was their relative wealth and social status, rather than their unconventional lifestyles. At Melbourne Mansions and its successor blocks, members of Melbourne's middle- and upper-middle-classes would take up residence, sometimes as singles or young marrieds, but more often as retired or semi-retired couples or widows and widowers. The other noticeable feature of flat-dwellers – as would be expected given the profile of tenants just outlined – was that women featured quite strongly. Some, as we shall see in the next chapter were owner-occupiers living on the proceeds of an inheritance or investment, but the majority were simply single women who perhaps in an earlier period would have lived in a boarding house, but were forced by the decline in status of these places to consider setting up a flat, either alone or with a sibling or friend.[1]

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[1] As with the other issues raised in this thesis, the lack of detailed Census material makes it difficult to ascertain the number of residents per flat and their relationship to each other. The St Kilda Rate Books list the number of residents per dwelling, but in many cases these are inaccurate – not updated after tenants have moved out. It is also difficult to ascertain whether these numbers relate to adults or adults and children. In some cases it is also likely that they refer to servants or hired help. A check of the electoral rolls for some blocks allows one to find registered voters over twenty-one years of age, and this has been carried out for some blocks. See below.

Critics of flats and flat-dwellers were oblivious to the relative wealth and social status of Melbourne's flat world. Rather than criticising reality, they were reacting against the idea of the flat and what it seemed to them to represent. To many of these critics flats were threatening on a number of grounds: The first and most obvious concern was that flats represented high-density living which, as we have seen, was unusual in Melbourne. Such dwellings were the antithesis of 'home' and were felt to promote unhealthy and promiscuous mixing of the sexes in reasonably anonymous surroundings. The second was the perception that flats represented a 'foreign' way of life, perhaps a visible reminder that the world and its problems were not only incapable of being kept out of mind in Melbourne, but were increasingly physically coming to the city itself. The third was that flats were visible symbols of changing lifestyles, and that not only singles, but young married couples who were also associated with flats, lived unconventional lives incompatible with family responsibilities and the raising of children. More parochially, flats were also a problem in suburban streets where they were said to overshadow neighbours and create problems with increased traffic and parking.

Supporters of Flats

Many local commentators praised the coming of flats as evidence of a growing sophistication in Melbourne. In 1913 the *Real Property Annual* argued that flats in Melbourne were mostly the preserve of 'newcomers' to the city, mainly because many locals saw 'flat dwelling' as 'an exotic habit, imported from Europe and America'. The journal seemed to lament the fact that flats had not really become genuinely popular among Melbourne's wider population, and wondered when this would occur.[2] The *Leader* described Melbourne Mansions as the introduction to the city of 'the system of residential flats so general in the larger cities of the old world, but hitherto unknown in Australia, except on a small scale in Sydney'. An article, part of 'Christmas Supplement' that reviewed the city's buildings and features, listed the services available to tenants at Melbourne Mansions, before suggesting in what were obviously approving tones, that the

block offered 'every arrangement for securing privacy and homeliness to each tenant'.[3]

After the First World War many people called for flats to become a more common feature of Melbourne's urban landscape. Architects, architectural writers and contributors to magazines and journals devoted to housing issues appear to have been especially keen for Melburnians to adopt the flat as a way of life. Most argued that the flats were an obvious solution to the increasing difficulties associated with the shortage of servants and the consequent problems of maintaining large houses. Blocks such as Melbourne Mansions and others that provided in-house servants or meals were particularly praised. A writer in the *Real Property Annual* in 1919 saw these places as allowing people sick of the 'worry and annoyance' that was the large old home, to 'live in a modern and well-appointed flat, with servants and first-class meals provided' without 'many of the uncertainties of present-day home management'. Writing about Mayfair, a new block in Marne Street, South Yarra s/he suggested that like most new high-class flats, this building came complete with a restaurant and dining hall, as well as maid's quarters and other modern conveniences such as garages.[4]

The convenience of flats became a rallying cry for their advocates during the interwar years. Not only the modern internal conveniences flats offered, but their location close to the city and leisure spots, became features to be advertised in their favour. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s articles in housing, 'lifestyle' and architecture journals, portrayed flats as the logical solution to the housing needs of 'modern' people who lived life in the 'fast lane'. 'Architrave' wrote in *Table Talk* in 1921 that flats were designed for busy people who desired a residence close to the city. '[T]ime-saving is the very essence of flat life', s/he argued, 'and flats are built, as a rule, within walking distance of the city'.[5] A writer in the

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[2] *Real Property Annual*, 1913.

[3] *Leader*, 15 December 1906.

[4] *Real Property Annual*, 1919.

[5] *Table Talk*, 28 July 1921.

Australian Home Builder argued along similar lines in November 1922, suggesting that flats were likely to become increasingly popular with businessmen who were growing tired of the daily commute to the city and beginning to opt instead for 'residential buildings containing anything up to 200 suites' in near-city suburbs. 'These flats', he went on, will be run on co-operative lines, and on those of a first-class hotel, where comfort is assured'.[6] Several years later, architects and developers attempted to use similar arguments in an effort to overturn a City of Melbourne by-law forcing them to provide open-space around residential flat blocks. The *Argus* reported in 1929 that lobbyists representing these groups had told the council the rule was unnecessary in the city proper as 'persons who can afford to pay the rents required for more or less luxurious flats in the city and who are prepared to adopt this form of domesticity, are not desirous of having back yards or gardens in such situations', allegedly because such people didn't like gardening. Their efforts were in vain and the by-law remained in place.[7]

In 1924 a writer in the *Australian Home Builder* blamed Melbourne's sprawl for the growth of flats, and suggested that they were the natural outcome of the increasing annoyance felt by people in 'outlying parts' at the 'strain of long daily journeys to and from the city'. People whose business took them to the city each day 'desire to live near to Collins Street', the writer argued, and were consequently demanding and being provided with flats 'that combine all the features of a group of well-proportioned homes', as well as a 'janitor and house service staff that does all the heavy domestic work' for residents.[8] Similar reasons for the growth of flats were put forward a decade later in 1936. A *Herald* 'Correspondent' argued that land shortages were forcing people 'who wish to live in favoured areas' such as 'a seaside location' like St Kilda or Elwood to opt for a flat. Others were forced by economic necessity brought about by the Depression to swap their large houses for smaller flats. The Secretary of the Building Industry Congress was quoted as saying that while many Melburnians were once 'said to

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[6] *Australian Home Builder*, November 1922.
[7] *Argus*, 30 April 1929.
[8] *Australian Home Builder*, July 1924.

desire their own garden plot...[n]ow they have lost that desire – largely through the force of economic circumstance'. The 'main desire now', he said, 'is for a place to sleep, a place to park the car, and proximity to the area in which they find that they can live most pleasantly'.[9]

Nora Cooper, a long-time journalist and commentator on architecture with the *Australian Home Beautiful*, had argued along the same lines in 1933. She suggested that

> [p]eople who formerly kept up large establishments, have been obliged to cut down their expenditure, and the exchange of an unwieldy mansion for an up-to-date flat has provided the most dignified and comfortable way of solving a financial problem.

She went on to suggest, however, that the increasing numbers of flats in Melbourne represented something more, a 'deeper psychological' change, which she saw as the desire, in 'these days of faster living and multiplicity of interests', to spend more time on leisure pursuits and less on the upkeep of large old houses.[10] These advocates were perhaps the interwar equivalents of today's urban consolidationists who argue that 'empty-nesters' and young singles and families are demanding medium-density dwellings near the city, that more closely approximate their lifestyle and housing needs.[11]

Architects, especially those of a Modernist persuasion, became increasingly strident in their calls for more flats to be built in Melbourne as the 1930s wore on. For many the devotion to the single family house was symptomatic of the provincialism and backwardness of the city and its people. After returning from Europe in 1930 Edward Billson suggested that the means being followed to overcome the housing shortage there 'would prove startling to conservative Australian city fathers'. 'Europe', he said, 'had generally adopted the multiple flat scheme', with buildings of four stories with communal gardens and conveniences

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[9] *Herald*, 18 February 1936.

[10] *Australian Home Builder*, October 1933.

[11] There is a vast literature on urban consolidation and the changing demographics of Australian cities. For an overview of some of the arguments for and against by most of the major

becoming the norm. He went on to also claim that the need for perhaps *the* symbol of Australian suburbia, the 'unaesthetic back yard' had been 'practically eliminated' in Europe 'by the construction of one central or several private laundries on the roof'.[12]

In columns in the daily and weekly papers throughout the 1930s architectural commentators praised flats for their contribution to a modern urban landscape, which they argued, had previously been sadly lacking in Melbourne. Discussing garden apartments in 1933, one writer in the *Age* argued that the demand for flats suggested that Melburnians were finally being weaned from 'the individualistic notion of a home', and learning to accept 'home building for a community'.[13] The tendency for many of these flats to incorporate Modern architectural elements such as glass, steel and curved lines made them all the more desirable, and perhaps represented a faltering step towards worldly sophistication. Another writer in the *Age* explicitly argued along these lines, suggesting that many of the new flats being built 'in the near suburbs', indicated that 'a new branch of architecture is slowly, but surely evolving itself'. 'The advances made in the domestic field recently', he went on, 'clearly show that a new brand of architecture is in the process of development, and might conceivably produce types of beauty and simplicity'.[14]

The theme of Melbourne's backwardness, not just in contrast with Europe and America, but with Sydney, its putative Australian rival, became something of a battle-cry for these commentators. The *Australian Home Builder* and its successor titles contained many articles comparing Sydney's tall and strikingly modern flats with Melbourne's attachment to the single-family house. Nora Cooper argued in 1934 that 'Sydney has always, to some extent, been the home of the flat-dweller', largely because the 'Sydney-sider is more easy-going and less home-loving than

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protagonists see *Historic Environment*, Vol. 13 No. 1, 1997, 'Urban Consolidation'.

[12] *Age*, 18 November 1930.

[13] Ibid, 2 May 1933.

[14] Ibid, 1 May 1934.

his Melbourne brother'. He was also more likely to use public rather rather private open spaces, partly at least because of the warmer northern climate.[15] Writing in the *Journal of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects* in 1938, Robert Hamilton derided Melbourne's aversion to the flat as evidence of a 'people influenced by facile transport arrangements and climatic conditions [to] either the individual house or the smaller type of flat building'. He also argued that the small number of flats in central Melbourne was a result of the 'restrictive, and to my mind, unwise, nature of the City of Melbourne building regulations'. He compared Melbourne with Sydney, where, he said, 'the sense for living in flats' had developed 'to a much stronger degree'. Even so, Australian cities in general were far behind 'leading cities abroad', especially in Europe where building regulations allowed for a far greater number of flats to be built, and where 'the general desire of the people [is] to reside near the heart of the city'.[16]

Critics of Flats.

While proponents of flats saw them as heralding a new way of life that was more rational, cosmopolitan and sophisticated than the Australian tradition of living in single family houses, other commentators were deeply suspicious of all they stood for. They noted the coming of flats to Australia and Melbourne but didn't see this as anything to welcome or promote. Most took little heed of the actual social profile of flat blocks and insisted – or implied – that there was little if any difference between flat-dwellers and the denizens of what they called the worst slum-tenement houses.

George and Florence Taylor of the Sydney journal *Building*, saw flats as a scourge best resisted if our national life was to prosper. Flats were destroyers of families and home life, undermining home ownership and individual effort. 'It tears down character so, this flat and hotel life', wrote Florence. 'A woman grows

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[15] *Australian Home Beautiful*, February 1934.

[16] R. Hamilton, 'Modern Flat Development in Melbourne', *Journal of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects*, Vol. XI, May –June 1938, pp. 45–6.

self-centred and fretful because she has nothing to do', while 'a girl becomes selfish and blase because she thinks only of her pleasures, and because she sees those about her thinking of only themselves and their pleasures'.[17] In 1910 she bemoaned the number of flats appearing in Sydney, including one she claimed was so small that a tenant was on the lookout for a 'folding toothbrush'.[18] In 1912 George Taylor took umbrage at the poor social example set by 'Lieutenant-Governor and Chief Justice', Sir John Madden in taking up residence at Cliveden Mansions. According to George, Sir John's decision had 'set the hallmark of fashion in the flat habit' in Melbourne and now 'everybody that is anybody is casting eyes more or less longingly in the same direction'. He voiced concerns that groups below the 'vice regal set and its satellites' were also warming to the flat idea. These groups, unable to afford large suites would, he feared, double- and triple-up, leading to the creation of what he called the 'human formicary' of overcrowded buildings and areas.[19]

This was perhaps the nub of the Taylors' concerns. Their politics and devotion to what Michael Roe has called 'pragmatic progressivism' led them very easily to authoritarianism and a belief that those less educated than themselves and their peers were incapable of knowing what was in their own best interests. Roe argues that George Taylor especially was inclined towards political and social views that favoured 'manly' activities and the belief in an Australian national character that glorified fresh air and outdoor pursuits, incompatible with high-density flat life. Roe also argues that George Taylor argued in favour of 'expert' leadership and government by men of martial, business and other experience. Some of his views, especially on the planning and governance of Canberra, were 'to show as clearly as any Australian', says Roe, 'that progressivism could take fascist colouring', and that what he advocated was an 'elitist technocracy to inspire society' towards its vision of the future.[20] George's concern about flats is indicative of a strong

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[17] *Building*, 8 April 1909.

[18] Ibid, 12 October 1910.

[19] Ibid, 12 August 1910.

[20] M. Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives*, pp. 191–2.

Australian distrust of them as 'foreign', a way of life alien to Australian traditions, and perhaps representative of a new 'cosmopolitanism', that he and others of similar political and social viewpoints despised. His comments about Sir John Madden's living arrangements were reflective of these traits, and of a fear that if this new scourge was not stamped out quickly it might spread and in the process undermine the country.

This concern about flats was echoed by many commentators over the next thirty years and beyond. Most opponents of flats seemed to wilfully conflate tenement houses and purpose-built flats in order to establish a link between the idea of flats and tenements in the minds of the public. Richard Dennis has argued that Toronto's anti-flat campaigners did the same, mainly in order to create a link in the public's mind between the squalor and vice of Scottish and other European tenements and the increasingly popular American-style apartment.[21] Australian critics similarly argued that the only real difference between a slum tenement or lodging house and a luxurious inner city flat was a matter of degrees. In a 1918 discussion of the impending postwar housing shortage the *Argus* argued that the splitting up of houses into flats 'threatens to become a serious evil'.[22] The building of real flats and the development of the '"flat habit", was developing and spreading very greatly', and that flats 'have become available not only in the city, at St Kilda, and others of the nearer suburbs', but 'further out' including in East Camberwell. The article went on to argue that this 'great increase in "flat life"', and the crowding of several families into one house was agreed by most to be 'an unhealthy thing'.[23] Flats were a necessary evil in large overseas cities with limited space, 'but Melbourne has not reached the stage when houses must be built up into the a... for lack of space on the ground'.

Flats were especially considered a problem for families with children. They were said to undermine family values and, as argued by Florence Taylor, considered

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[21] R. Dennis, 'Interpreting the apartment house', p. 308.

[22] *Argus*, 17 August 1918.

[23] Ibid.

likely to tempt women away from having children and fulfilling their 'natural' child-bearing function.[24] Flats were also considered inappropriate places for rearing Australian children, for whom sunshine and fresh air were seen in many quarters as a national birthright. Nora Cooper of the *Australian Home Builder* who became an advocate of flats in the 1930s, was not so sanguine about them a decade or so earlier. In the early 1920s she voiced concerns about the 'blocks of tiny flats that are springing up, mushroom-like (in more ways than one), in many southern suburbs' of Melbourne.[25] 'A flat of any kind', she argued, 'must be very well equipped indeed if it is to be regarded as a home at all'. But many of Melbourne's flats, she went on, consisted of only 'two or three cramped rooms, a kitchenette, and diminutive balcony'.

After asking, 'Can a Flat be Made a Home?', Cooper's answer was an emphatic 'no', especially for families with children. A mother had a bad time in flats, she suggested, because she always had to worry about her children's noise and its effect on her neighbours. She also had to worry about the children's safety if she let them play outdoors, and was always concerned about their inability to play spontaneously and discover their environment.[26] Cooper's major concern, along with other commentators, was that flats did not allow 'our children to grow into the free independent Australians we would have them be'. To develop in such a way, what children needed were 'real homes, which will provide, besides food and shelter, a centre of interest and diversion consonant with the expansion of young minds'. More importantly, children needed 'a real home, which they will remember tenderly years afterwards as the abiding place of their youth, the theme of poets and painters since the world began'.[27]

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[24] For similar debates in Perth at the same time see Jenny Gregory and Robyn Taylor, '"The Slums of Tomorrow"?'.

[25] *Australian Home Builder*, May 1923.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid; The issues raised here conform to some of the issues Kerreen Reiger and others have discussed about eugenics and the 'national stock' discussed above. There were also concerns raised about the type of people propagating the race, and the environment in which children were being reared. For a broader discussion of these issues see Chapter Four above.

Some of these poets wrote to the *Bulletin* criticising flats and flat-dwellers. In 1921 'Eddyson' ostensibly set out his unpleasant experiences in a St Kilda Road flat by telling of the noise and too close familiarity of flat-living. In the 'Happy Flatite', flat-dwellers were portrayed as noisy, thoughtless people with dubious morals and a poor attitude to work. 'Barley' who lived with his wife and children in the flat next door was a drunk with a womanising past, while Mrs Barley was a lazy gadabout whose children were neglected while she gossiped or went out late, leaving her children to be looked after by neighbours. 'Flatite' and his family eventually had enough and moved out because

> ...no flat in any building that we'd suffered in was worth
> The comfort of a camp-out. So we're flat upon the earth.[28]

'Dido' also wrote poetry about flats, this time concentrating on their unsuitability for children. In his/her block children were allowed 'on several conditions', mostly to do with never behaving like children by playing or making any noise. The writer found a solution to this problem by insisting on certain rules:

> No babe of ours e'er runs or whoops
> We're rearing all of them – *in coops* (Original emphasis). [29]

His/her experiences would appear to be verified by the childless residents at Brockton in Punt Road, South Yarra who wrote to the managers of their block, South Yarra real estate agents Williams and Company (Co) complaining of the noise made by children playing in the back yard. The company wrote to a resident with children, Mrs Bluett in 1932 and asked her to try to keep her children quiet. They claimed to have no problem with 'the tenants' children playing in the yard, but could not 'allow other children to come into the flats to play as it is annoying to other tenants in the building'.[30]

John and Ezra Norton's *Truth* explicitly linked flats with vice and occasionally racial miscegenation. Flats were portrayed in the newspaper as 'foreign' to the Australian way of life, and indicative of a collapse in social and moral mores.

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[28] Eddyson, 'The Happy Flatite', *Bulletin*, 3 February 1921.

[29] Dido, 'Baby Farming', Ibid, 1 June 1922.

'Flat life...' became a common headline in the *Truth* in the 1920s as flats were increasingly portrayed as the places in which illicit affairs and pre-marital sex took place. But as with other commentators on flats, journalists at the *Truth* made little effort to differentiate between proper flats, boarding houses and tenements. An expose of a divorce case in October 1921 was headlined 'Flat-Life at St Kilda' and was sub-headed 'Cleary and His Lady Friends', and 'Wife's Craze for Jazzing', thus covering just about all the perceived vices of the 1920s. But in this case the so-called 'flat' was at Killeen, a boarding house in Grey Street, which suggested that *Truth's* editors were either attempting to fan the flames of community concerns about flats, or were intent on creating those concerns.[31] A year later, after a police raid on Boolan Flats in Victoria Parade East Melbourne, the *Truth* again linked flats and vice, its headlines shrieking about 'Flat life', 'Young couples Arrested in Bed', and the 'Gay Girls and Their Gentleman Friends' arrested in the raid.[32]

This link was maintained throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s. In 1925 La Mascotte in Elwood was named as the site of illicit goings-on between Nell Younger, a member 'of the Davidson family', and John Robertson Whitehead, 'assistant secretary to the Leicester Knitting Mills, [and] a close friend of the Davidson family'. The report of the subsequent divorce case was entitled, '"Fun" in a Flat: "Fun" at a Ball: "Fun" Over the Niagra Fall'.[33] Three years later an attempt was made to link flats with prostitution. 'An amazing story of the manners and morals of St Kilda flat life, in which two young girls, not yet out of their teens, figured prominently' was published in February 1928. The story revolved around an undercover police operation to entrap prostitutes that had involved a policeman being lured back to a flat in Alma Road by two young women he had met at a dance hall. The headline 'Two Flappers in a Flat' pushed all the right moral buttons and linked flats with flappers, dancing and vice. But,

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[30] Williams and Co Collection, University of Melbourne Archives, File: GE Prior.

[31] *Truth*, 1 October 1921.

[32] Ibid, 11 March 1922.

[33] Ibid, 13 June 1925.

again 'flat' was used as a generic term to mean non-family housing as the young women did not live in a flat, but had rooms in an apartment house.[34]

But perhaps the lowest point in the *Truth's* campaign against flats came a month later in March 1928 when it embarked on an attack on the activities of Black American jazz musicians who were staying at Rowena Mansions in Nicholson Street, East Melbourne while performing a series of shows in Melbourne. The musicians, members of 'Sonny Clay's Coloured Idea', appear to have been tracked by *Truth* reporters in both Sydney and Melbourne and were found to have become sexually involved with young white Australian women. In both cities the journalists stressed that both the men and the women stayed in flats and appear to have attempted to link these with the vice they suggested was occurring. Rowena Mansions was described as 'a three-storey concrete building fronting Nicholson-street' and the musicians were said to have 'occupied flats Nos. 2 and 6 which are in front, and have windows looking out onto the street'. This allowed police and reporters to one night view 'the abandoned dancing and shocking happenings before the windows of the flat', a situation that appears to have offended the sensibilities of the journalists, who presumably believed this sort of thing should occur behind closed curtains.[35]

The abandonment included dancing, drunkenness and cocaine use. Some of the women were said to have been sleeping with the men.[36] *Truth* was outraged that this wasn't an offence in itself, and appears to have been disgusted that the only option available to the police was to charge the women with vagrancy – a charge that was later found untrue. The men were not charged with any crime – they had not committed any that could be proved – but left the country soon after. Richard Hall argued in the *Age* 'Good Weekend' in 1997 that the episode both emphasised the racial intolerance of Australia in the 1920s, and the obsession Ezra Norton had with race. He argues that the use of the term 'negro' in the Melbourne edition of

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[34] Ibid, 4 February 1928.

[35] Ibid, 31 March 1928.

[36] Ibid.

the paper was replaced in Sydney by '"niggers and coons", reflecting the hand one suspects of Ezra Norton'.[37] He also suggests that the whole incident was a set-up by the Commonwealth Investigation Branch who contacted the Victorian Police Commissioner Thomas Blamey with the 'objectionable' evidence that 'the Negroes in question consorted with white women'. The Federal government reacted by banning such bands from coming to Australia – a ban that lasted until 1954.[38]

The mid-1930s saw the *Truth* take offence at the number of flats being built in St Kilda, which was said to be 'bound for slum status', because of the 'Rafferty's Rules' being allowed to operate there in relation to building. Arguing that a new building by-law would make the municipality 'a land robber's Magna Charta (sic)', and allow it to remain 'the shoddy flat-builder's paradise', *Truth* urged caution and joined with the Elwood Progress Association in calling for 'more stringent supervision of flat building' and zoning.[39] Later that year it reported on investigations into the suburb which had found some 'back areas were discovered which would make a Fitzroy councillor blush'.[40] As in the 1920s, no effort was made to differentiate between flats and tenements, although one block of the former whose 'back balconies served as clotheslines', was said to tower '[o]ver a jungle of civilisation more ghastly than any tangled tropical swamp'. The cause of this was poor or non-existent building regulations, which allowed 'flat builders [to] make hay in the sunshine', and turn a once 'garden city' into a slum of the future.

In the late 1930s *Truth's* dislike of flats turned to the design of the buildings themselves. Readers were alerted in February 1937 to the 'Eyesore Exploiters... Making Melbourne Nightmare City'. Melbourne was reported to be in the 'Grip of Shoddy Building Mania' that threatened a 'World Reputation for Beauty'. The

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[37] R. Hall, 'White Australia's Darkest Days'. 'Good Weekend', *Age*, 15 March 1997, pp. 17–23; See also S. Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia Vol. IV*, pp. 206–7.

[38] R. Hall, Ibid.

[39] *Truth*, 1 June 1935.

cause of this were '[h]ungry builders in the mad rush to make money quickly with the return of prosperity'.[41] These builders were constructing, along with offices and factories, 'a new atrocity' that was said to be afflicting 'some residential suburbs – St Kilda and South Yarra in particular' – '[g]rotesquely "modern" blocks of flats, planned without an architect's supervision, and looking like giant packing cases'. The concern wasn't so much with Modern architecture, which 'might reasonably satisfy the eye...if not uplift the mind', but at the ease with which it was possible to 'convert a St Kilda street into a slum artery of the future'.[42]

They were right to a certain extent, and residents of South Yarra, St Kilda and other areas were becoming increasingly concerned with the encroachment of flats into their neighbourhoods. The Final Report of the Metropolitan Town Planning Commission commented adversely on the large numbers of flats built in the 1920s and suggested that its new zoning recommendations were designed to gradually eliminate their presence by making 'the building or use of flats a less attractive proposition'.[43] Anne Longmire has reported on the increasing disquiet felt by some St Kilda residents at the large number of flats built there in the mid-to-late 1930s. This was especially the case in Elwood which saw itself as more of a quiet suburban neighbourhood than was the central St Kilda area.[44] Longmire quotes the complaints of a delegation to the Council of local residents who were concerned about flats which were 'spoiling the appearance of the whole street'. They were concerned about the visual pollution of laundry 'including girls' lingerie' which was 'hung out of the window with a disfiguring effect' on the neighbourhood.[45] Another Elwood resident complained about flats in his street in

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[40] Ibid, 2 November 1935.

[41] *Truth*, 27 February 1937.

[42] Ibid; Also see J. Gregory and R. Taylor, '""The Slums of Tomorrow"?'.

[43] Metropolitan Town Planning Commission, *Plan of General Development: Melbourne. Report of the Metropolitan Town Planning Commission*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1929, p. 250.

[44] Anne Longmire, *St Kilda*, pp. 64–5.

[45] Elwood Progress Association, February 1934 quoted in Ibid. p. 64.

1935, suggesting that they 'were destructive of the best citizenship' and that home owners should be protected from their encroachment into residential streets.[46]

During the Second World War, Patricia Counihan, a member of University of Melbourne Economist Wilfred Prest's team of social surveyors also commented on flats. One of her survey areas was St Kilda, and her comments on most of the blocks she visited there were negative. She described the flats at number eight The Bluff in Elwood as being 'a future slum' that had quickly deteriorated since being built in the late 1920s, and urgently needed 'doing up'. The three flats above shops at 127 Glenhuntly Road, Elwood were 'not conveniently composed', being 'full of dark corners', with walls that 'need doing up', while Miami Flats in Hood Street were 'jerry-built', with 'some cracks appearing already'. Counihan was also concerned at the lack of privacy afforded by flats. Deanholme Flats in Jackson Street needed 'sound-proofing', and had 'practically no back yard' in which tenants could take fresh air. Allara Flats in The Avenue, St Kilda were of an 'expressionless modern type' with 'poky rooms, and lacked privacy because the block was 'too close to identical blocks on either side'. She noted whether flats had their own entrances and asked tenants whether this was a cause of concern, which it invariably was. These concerns perhaps reflected Counihan's political views. She, along with her husband, the artist Noel Counihan, was a communist who perhaps believed that the ideal of the detached home reflected Australia's relative egalitarianism and should be retained and nurtured as a feature of national life. Her comments may also simply be a reaction to the unpleasant conditions she and Noel were experiencing in flats and rooming houses in Parkville and St Kilda during this period.[47]

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[46] Ibid.

[47] University of Melbourne Archives, W. Prest Social Survey, Box 30, Returns from St Kilda, Area 26, Nos. 290C, 321A, 329, 172A; On the Prest Social Survey see W. Prest, *Housing, Income and Saving in War-Time: A Local Survey*, Department of Economics, University of Melbourne, 1952; Graeme Davison and John Lack, 'Planning the New Social Order: The Melbourne University Social Survey, 1941– 3', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 17, No. 1, March 1981, pp. 36–45; Kate Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front: Melbourne in Wartime 1939–1945*, OUP, Melbourne, 1990, esp. Ch. 3, 'Housing and Homes'; On Pat Counihan's involvement with the Prest Social Survey, and the living conditions she and her husband endured see Bernard Smith, *Noel Counihan: Artist and Revolutionary*, OUP, Melbourne, 1993, pp. 177, 161–3; Other researchers on the project were not so critical of flats, but this may simply reflect

Sally Wilde has suggested that in the 1930s many complaints were made to Prahran Council about the proliferation of flats on lands carved out of the former large estates on the hills of South Yarra and Toorak. One development in Toorak Road even gained ecclesiastical censure, criticised by Dr Law of St John's Church for its inappropriateness in such an area.[48] The Council attempted to pass a series of by-laws restricting the building of flats, including regulations passed in 1933 and 1935 limiting the height and bulk of flat-blocks in certain streets. Both by-laws also restricted the amount of land that could be covered by the block.[49] In 1934 WS Kent Hughes, Honorary State Minister and Member for Kew voiced concerns about the number of flats being erected in Toorak, arguing that 'a first-class slum area had been created' there, and that allowing the development of flats would before long 'be regretted by municipal authorities'.[50] The Chairman of the Victorian Health Commission disagreed, although he did suggest that in his opinion some flats 'did certainly resemble "rabbit warrens" and were poor places in which to rear children'. A writer in the women's section of the *Age* agreed with Kent Hughes to a certain extent, suggesting that flats were no place for children, and that if badly built were potentially destined for slum status. But she went on to argue that flats were often the best solution to housing problems for single

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the relative luxuriousness of flats in more affluent areas such as South Yarra and Toorak. In South Yarra for instance Dianne Eddy referred to the six flats at 57–9 Avoca Street, South Yarra as 'new modern flats in excellent order inside and out. All well-furnished, compact and comfortable'. 'Social Survey', Box 22 Prahran, Area 21, No. 222A; Prest himself may have also been more kindly disposed to flat-living than Counihan as he resided at the Fountain Flats in The Avenue, Parkville in the mid–1940s. See MCC *Rate Books* 1945, PROV, VPRS 5708 Unit 121; On the belief in the detached, owner-occupied home among some sections of the Australian Left see Patrick Troy, 'Suburbs of Acquiesence, Suburbs of Protest', Unpublished MS, ANU, 1998; P. Troy, *The Perils of Urban Consolidation*, Federation Press, Sydney, 1996, esp. Ch. 5, 'Democracy, Participation and Citizenship'; Also see 'New Essay: Government and the Cities 1975–2000', in the third edition of Hugh Stretton's *Ideas for Australian Cities*, Transit Australia Publishing, Sydney, 1989, esp. pp. XLI–XLVI, 'What urban consolidation can and can't do'.

[48] S. Wilde, *The History of Prahran*, p. 68.

[49] *Age*, 5 March 1933; Prahran By–Law No. 183 'Residential Flats', published in *Victorian Government Gazette*, No. 121, 24 June 1933; By–Law No. 188 'Residential Flats', Ibid, No. 151, 25 September 1935.

[50] *Age* 7 June 1934.

people and for those who didn't want the stresses and bothers of owning and/or maintaining a house.[51]

The Municipal Association of Victoria also voiced concerns about the rapid growth of flats and attempted to frame a uniform by-law relating to flat development across the metropolis. John Gawler, a Box Hill councillor and later a member of the Commonwealth Housing Commission, argued that the lack of uniform regulations could lead to 'unhealthy housing', and possibly the development of 'slum conditions', especially where single-family houses were divided up into flats.[52] But a motion to an Association meeting to create such a uniform law was defeated. Four months later a writer in the 'Building and Architecture' section of the *Age* argued that the lack of a uniform law on flats showed the need for a Greater Melbourne Council to co-ordinate development across the city. Citing the rejection of a planning permit by a 'northern municipality', the writer argued that the flats were well-designed and did not contravene local regulations, and that therefore the only conclusion that could be drawn was that 'either considerations of the site influenced the decision, or that councillors in this, as in other municipalities, are vaguely apprehensive of any sudden increase in the number of flats' in their area, mainly because they were unpopular with existing residents.[53]

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[51] Ibid, 12 June 1934.

[52] Ibid, 22 November 1934.

[53] Ibid, 5 March 1935; For a discussion of the push for a Greater Melbourne Council see D. Dunstan, *Governing the Metropolis: Politics, Technology and Social Change in a Victorian City: Melbourne 1850–1891*, MUP in association with the City of Melbourne, Melbourne, 1984, 'A Twentieth Century Postscript: The Board of Works, the City Council and the Persistent Idea of a Greater Melbourne Council'; and his 'Smaller Greater Melbourne', in A. May (ed), *The Living Heart: Images and Prospects for Central Melbourne*, Monash Publications in History, No. 15, Melbourne, 1993, pp. 3–14; Also see Tony Dingle and Carolyn Rasmussen, *Vital Connections: Melbourne and its Board of Works 1891–1991*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Melbourne, 1991, passim; On Uniform Building Regulations see J. S. Gawler, *A Roof Over My Head*, Lothian, Melbourne, 1963, Part 2, Chapter 3, and Part 4, Chapter 2.

The image of flat-dwellers, then, was of quite openly disreputable people living a bohemian life on the fringes of respectability. But was this actually the case, or does this image simply reflect the distaste many Australians felt toward lifestyles and living arrangements other than the nuclear family in its own detached home? To test this idea I have undertaken a survey of flats and flat-dwellers in several areas of inner Melbourne – including the City of Melbourne and the West Ward of the City of St Kilda in the period 1920–1945. The survey primarily involves the use of municipal Rate Books from these local government areas, but also relies on electoral rolls where these are unavailable. The aim is to discover who were the tenants, their occupations, and where possible their length of stay.

When Melbourne Mansions opened in 1906 it soon became known as *the* place to live in Melbourne and the building's status was soon reflected in its tenant profile. In 1909 sixteen people listed their address as Melbourne Mansions or 91–101 Collins Street in the electoral roll for the subdivision of La Trobe. Of the ten males, three gave their occupation as 'independent means', while four were managers, one was an engineer, and another – presumably employed as a servant – was a pantryman. Women tenants were mainly engaged in 'home duties', although one was a housemaid, and another independently wealthy. One suite was occupied by Charles and Alice Ryan, the parents of Maie Casey.[54] By 1913, forty-four residents were listed in the electoral rolls. Several, including Edward Edwards, David Ferguson, Frederick Garside and Annie Stubbs had been there since at least 1909. A majority of the tenants listed in 1913 – twenty-four of the forty-four – were women. Most of these gave their occupation as home duties, although three were independently wealthy. One female tenant, Mary Burness,

[54] Victoria Electoral Rolls, 1909, Electorate: Melbourne. Subdivision of La Trobe; Maie Casey makes no mention of her family's residence at Melbourne Mansions in either volume of her autobiography. *An Australian Story 1837–1907*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1965 (First published 1962), finishes with the family living at 37 Collins Street, while *Tides and Eddies*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1969 (First published 1966), virtually skips straight to 1914 and the coming of war; Casey's biographer, Dianne Langmore notes that she was overseas at boarding school during this

was a nurse, and Helen Sexton, one of the earliest female medical practitioners in Melbourne, and co-founder of the Queen Victoria Hospital for Women, was also listed as a tenant in 1913.[55]

Later tenants included the Cohens, owners among other enterprises of Carlton and United Breweries. Their granddaughter, Barbara Falk has recalled their daily life in the period from before the war until the 1930s. Her grandparents, she says, ate breakfast in their suite but went downstairs to the communal dining-room for lunch and most evening meals.[56] The family had their own table in the dining-room where they sat for each meal, in much the same way boarding house tenants did. Barbara Falk does not remember Melbourne Mansions as a friendly or jovial place, rather the atmosphere in the dining-room was stuffy, and the rest of the block 'was not a cosy spot where people got together'. They acknowledged each other's presence, but did not talk or socialise much. Most tenants were of a similar class and social status to the Cohens and their relations with one another reflected the quite formal social norms of these groups. The conventional values of the block were reflected in the purely formal acknowledgement afforded one of the tenants, Lizette Bentwitch, the long-term mistress of Sir John Monash. 'We bow to Miss Bentwich, but we don't speak', the Cohen grandchildren were instructed before they entered the dining-room on their rare visits to Melbourne Mansions. Her unconventional public relationship with Monash meant Bentwich was something of a social outcast whose behaviour was deemed unacceptable to other residents – a situation that scarcely seems symptomatic of bohemian carryings-on or a tolerance or unconventional values.[57]

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period. See D. Langmore, *Glittering Surfaces: A Life of Maie Casey*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1997, Ch. 1, 'Victorian Child'.

[55] M. Casey, *An Australian Story*, p. 138; Penny Russell suggests that this is probably inaccurate as Sexton lived overseas from 1912 to 1914. See P. Russell, 'Hannah Mary Helen Sexton, 1862–1950', *ADB, Vol. 11 1891–1939 Nes–Smi*, MUP, Melbourne, 1988, p. 570.

[56] B. Falk, Interview Parkville, 4 May 1998; Also see her short autobiographical essay, 'The unpayable debt'; She has also expanded on her family's story in *No Other Home: An Anglo-Jewish Story 1833–1987*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1988.

[57] Geoffrey Serle's biography of Monash does not list Melbourne Mansions as one of Bentwitch's long-term addresses. He suggests only that she 'resided in turn at the Windsor, Cliveden Mansions and the Oriental', G. Serle, *John Monash: A Biography*, MUP in association with Monash University, Melbourne, 1982, p. 494; The electoral rolls only list her address once – in 1924 – as

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As we have seen, Cliveden Mansions was created as a variation of the American apartment hotel idea out of the former Clarke family mansion in East Melbourne in 1911. Like Melbourne Mansions, it too gained a reputation as '*the* place to stay in Melbourne'.[58] In part this reflected its history as the former home of Australia's only hereditary baronet, and partly by the connections and social pedigree of the financial backers of the conversion project, the Baillieu family.[59] In 1967 *Truth* described Cliveden Mansions as a 'refuge for the rich' that for years had housed 'Melbourne's established families', especially older members whose spouses had died, leaving them alone in a big house in Toorak and South Yarra.[60] In 1917 the electoral rolls listed fifty-nine registered voters as being residents of Cliveden Mansions. These included George Taylor's *bete noir*, Sir John Madden and two other members of his family. Also resident were two surgeons and another doctor, a barrister and a solicitor, managers, importers, and ten people who listed their occupation as 'independent means'. Nine of this latter group were female, while another twenty-nine women gave their occupation as home duties. Only three of the women had paid employment. One was an associate, the second a governess, while the third was a housemaid, so is unlikely to have been a paying tenant.[61] Cliveden Mansions was obviously not a common lodging house, nor did its tenant profile mean it was likely to be a place where the socially unconventional would find too much latitude for their predilections.

By 1924 the tone of the place had, if anything, become more blue-blood. There were sixty-six residents listed in the electoral roll, several of whom were known for their wealth and/or social position. The newspaperman Keith Murdoch was a resident, as was John Macfarland, the Chancellor of the University of Melbourne. Women outnumbered men thirty-eight to twenty-eight, and virtually all of them

Cliveden Mansions, Victorian Electoral Rolls, Electorate: Melbourne. Subdivision of East Melbourne.

[58] *Herald*, 23 March 1968.

[59] *Table Talk*, 4 November 1909; *Herald*, 21 September 1967.

[60] *Truth*, 12 October 1963.

[61] Victoria Electoral Rolls 1924, Electorate: Melbourne. Subdivision of East Melbourne.

either performed home duties or were independently wealthy. The exceptions were Ada Collenette who was a companion, Daisy Herbertson a nurse, and Amy Preston and Rachel Strain who were housemaids.[62] Some of the more notable residents included Allan Everett, an Admiral, Phelia and Edward Grimwade, from the pharmaceutical and merchant family, and Joseph Plottel the architect and his wife, Rachel. Others were graziers, managers, stockbrokers, solicitors, a surgeon Robert Russell, and a physician Arthur Wigmore.

A similar social profile could be found in most of the blocks of flats established around Melbourne in the 1920s. 'Suzette', the social affairs writer in the *Truth* argued in 1926 that 'High Society' was speculating in real estate in South Yarra, and turning it into a 'Nob's Hill', dominated by flats.[63] Wealthy families, she suggested, were turning their houses over to high-class blocks of flats, which they were letting out at such high rents that 'only the most heavily gilded are able to afford to live therein'. 'Suzette' listed houses that had been converted in this manner, including Fairlie House, the former 'home of the Fitzgibbons in Anderson-street', the Stan Stoughton's St Neots, and the Clapp family mansion, all of which 'were turned into flats of a kind'. She also listed the newly-built Garden Court and Mayfair in Marne Street, and another unnamed block built by 'Harold Grimwade (the head of the firm of manufacturing chemists, and now by virtue of the marriage of his children into the squattocracy, a power in the land)'.[64] But these places were 'not mere burrows in which the congeries of horrors are herded, but rather a careful assortment of half a dozen expensive homes under one superior roof'. The tenants were only selected from the 'Very Best People' according to 'Suzette', and, because the owners did not really need the money

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[62] Ibid.

[63] *Truth*, 19 June 1926.

[64] L. Oscar Slater argues that Garden Court was designed by Joseph Plottel in 1918 for Frederick Payne owner of the Maritimo Estate. Local legend, he says, has it that the owner of Raveloe in Domain Road built 'a huge wall some ten metres in height and thirty in length...to preserve the privacy of their house and garden from the overlooking windows of the new corner block'. For years it was known as the 'Wall of Hate'. See L. Oscar Slater, *Walking Tour of South Yarra West*, p. 23.

these investments brought in, they rejected potential tenants they did not like and 'only their friends and relatives are accepted'.

Nearly every week *Table Talk* provided a less jaundiced profile of flat life in Melbourne. Its social column and 'Ladies Letter' would announce who had taken flats where, and whether they intended to become permanent residents or merely sojourners. As we saw in Chapter Six, residents of both Melbourne Mansions and Cliveden Mansions would frequently appear in these columns, but in the 1920s, increasingly so did residents of other blocks. In April 1921 the social pages noted that 'Brigadier-General and Mrs Harold Grimwade have taken a flat at Honolulu, Toorak-road, South Yarra for the winter months', and in June of the same year that the 'Misses Carrington have taken a flat at Grosvenor Flats, Brighton, the new building opposite the Brighton Yacht Club'.[65] By 1926 the author of the monthly 'Ladies Letter' was regularly extolling the virtues of flat life, even complaining that flats were becoming so popular in some areas such as Queens Road that 'people wait for months to get the lease of one'.[66] Again, there is no suggestion that the types of people these articles were written by/for were anything but the respectable middle- and upper classes.

Throughout the interwar period occupiers of flats were a diverse group, but in the main they tended to have middle-class occupations, or were women living alone or in small groups. Rate Book evidence to support this claim is, however, really only available for St Kilda, largely because these list the occupations of residents, while those of my other major study, the City of Melbourne, simply list the names of tenants, without noting their occupations. There are, however, one or two glimpses of occupational profiles of South Yarra's flats. South Yarra real estate agents Williams and Co kept a large rent roll and their records sometimes list tenants of entire blocks. One such block was Abercarn owned by envelope manufacturer Charles Rankin which was completed in late 1932 in Toorak Road (Illustration 22). In late December of that year Williams' wrote to Rankin

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[65] *Table Talk*, 21 April 1921; 30 June 1921.

[66] Ibid, 28 October 1926.

advising him that they had let five of the six flats, and included a tenant profile for his interest. The five head tenants were:

Flat 2 – Mr A Maling of Queen Street, Melbourne, Chairman Associated General Electric Industries Co. Ltd.,
Flat 3 – TB Heffer of Collins Street, Melbourne, Sub. Manager of Bank of New South Wales
Flat 4 – W Cain of Fairlie House, Anderson Street, South Yarra. – Station owner.
Flat 6 – Mrs Davies, Park Mansions, Park Street, South Yarra – station owner from Queensland.
Flat 5 – D. Reddan of Flinders Lane, Melbourne. Merchant.[67]

The social status of these tenants suggests they were unlikely to have engaged in unruly or unconventional behaviour, at least not within public view or earshot.

More is known about St Kilda's flat dwellers. At Florida Mansions in 1920, thirty-one tenants were listed (Illustration 23). Twenty-two were males, which probably more reflects the status of men as heads of household than any masculine bias in the block. The nine women were all listed as performing domestic duties, which suggests that they were either elderly widows or had independent incomes. The men were overwhelmingly members of the professional middle-class. Eight were gentlemen, two were financiers, eight were clerks, and there was one medical practitioner, a journalist, a merchant, and a manager.[68] Ten years later little had changed in the social profile of the block, although in 1928 a fire had necessitated renovations and extensions be carried out.[69] The most notable change in the tenant profile in the 1920s was its feminisation, with seventeen women and twelve men listed in 1930, as opposed to the twenty-two men and nine women ten years earlier. Three women, Mary Pike,

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[67] Williams and Co, File: Rankin.

[68] PROV, VPRS 8816 P1 Unit 125.

[69] Ibid, Unit 165; This count lists thirty-four flats in the block, one of which was occupied by a caretaker, which perhaps suggests that the block had been extended or altered. Five flats were vacant, probably reflecting the downturn in rental demand associated with the Depression; Carlotta Kellaway carried out research into Florida Mansions in 1981 for the National Trust, and found that a fire in 1928 had damaged the top floor of the building which contained nine flats. Bates, Smart and McCutcheon were then employed to redesign the block, and I can only assume that this is where the extra flats come from. See C. Kellaway, 'Research into Florida Mansions, 601 St Kilda Road, Melbourne', National Trust of Australia (Victoria), File No. 5056, Florida Mansions.

Eva Stephens and Ina Carney had been in residence since at least 1920, and as in the earlier survey, all of the women were listed as performing home duties. The twelve male tenants now included only two who listed themselves as gentleman – managers had become the most common occupation, with three resident at Florida Mansions. Other male residents included a woolbuyer, a chemist, military officer, engineer, agent, secretary, and the block's caretaker, William Quince.

Another ten years later in 1940, the block had a less well-off tenant base, but this is perhaps explained by the war and the age of the block. Frederick Dunsford who was a bank manager, and Sir Gilbert Dyett a secretary, certainly had high social status, but their fellow male tenants included Alfred Robinson and Clive de Lany whose occupations were a tailor and process engineer respectively, and were therefore of a less highly-ranked social status than had previously been the norm. Eva Stephens and Ina Carney were still in residence, and had thus resided at Florida for at least twenty years. Seventeen residents were female, ten were male and in seven cases not enough information was provided to be sure.

Another of St Kilda's early blocks was Yurnga, which was constructed at the end of the cable tram line in Brighton Road in 1920 (Illustration 24). It consisted of eighteen three-room flats and was owned by Mrs Mabel Wilson, who lived in the block.[70] In 1925 Mrs Wilson had quite a well-to-do mix of four female and thirteen male tenants. All the women worked at home but the men were employed as managers, indentors, as well as clerks, commercial travellers, a draper, a manufacturer, and an architect. Only James Bayliss listed himself as a gentlemen. Ten years later Mabel Wilson still owned the block but lived next door at number thirty-eight. None of her 1925 tenants remained in place, but the new group were of a similar social profile to their predecessors. Three flats were vacant, seven were occupied by women engaged in home duties, and the males included a

[70] PROV, VPRS 8816 P1 Unit 143. Mabel Wilson's occupation is given as 'home duties', although this appears to have been the standard designation for all women who did not work outside the home, even if they were large owners of property. Males in similar situations appear to have been designated as 'gentlemen' or 'investors'; On Yurnga see D. Dunbar, 'Residential Redevelopment', p. 118.

Illustration 22: Abercarn, Toorak Road West, South Yarra.
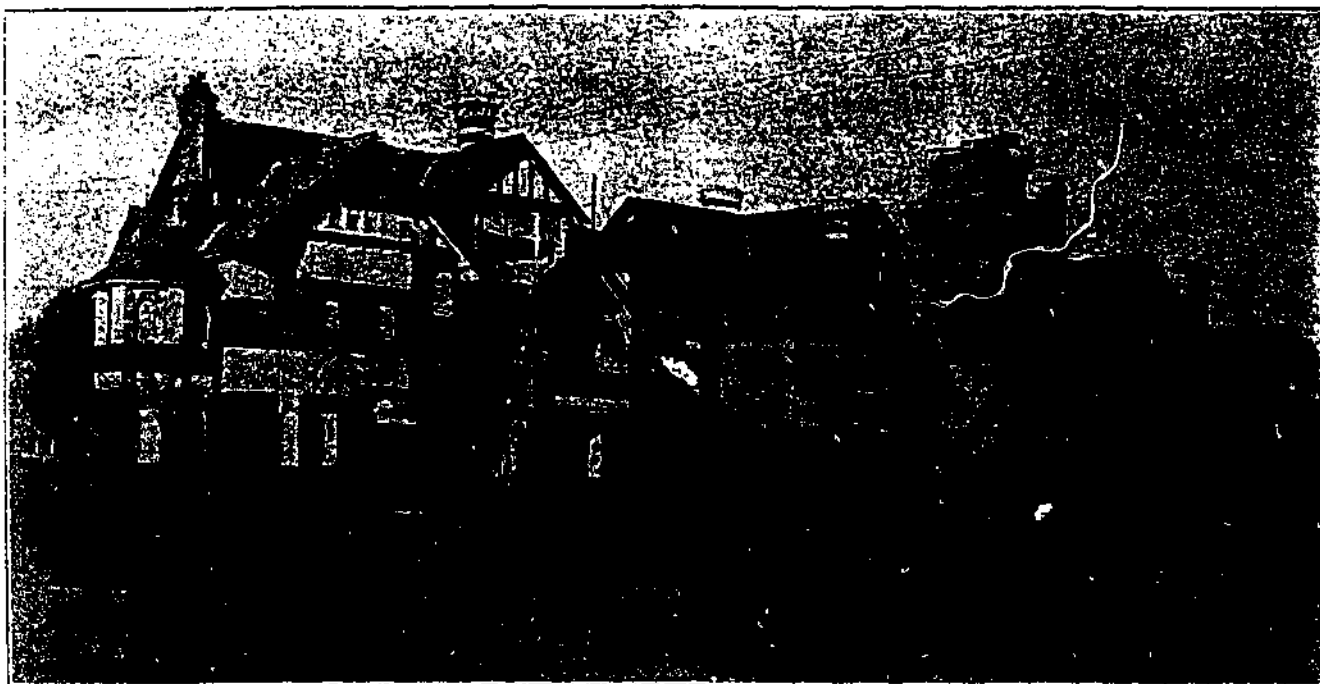

Illustration 23: Florida Mansions, St Kilda Road, Melbourne.
Source: *St Kilda By the Sea*, 1916–17.

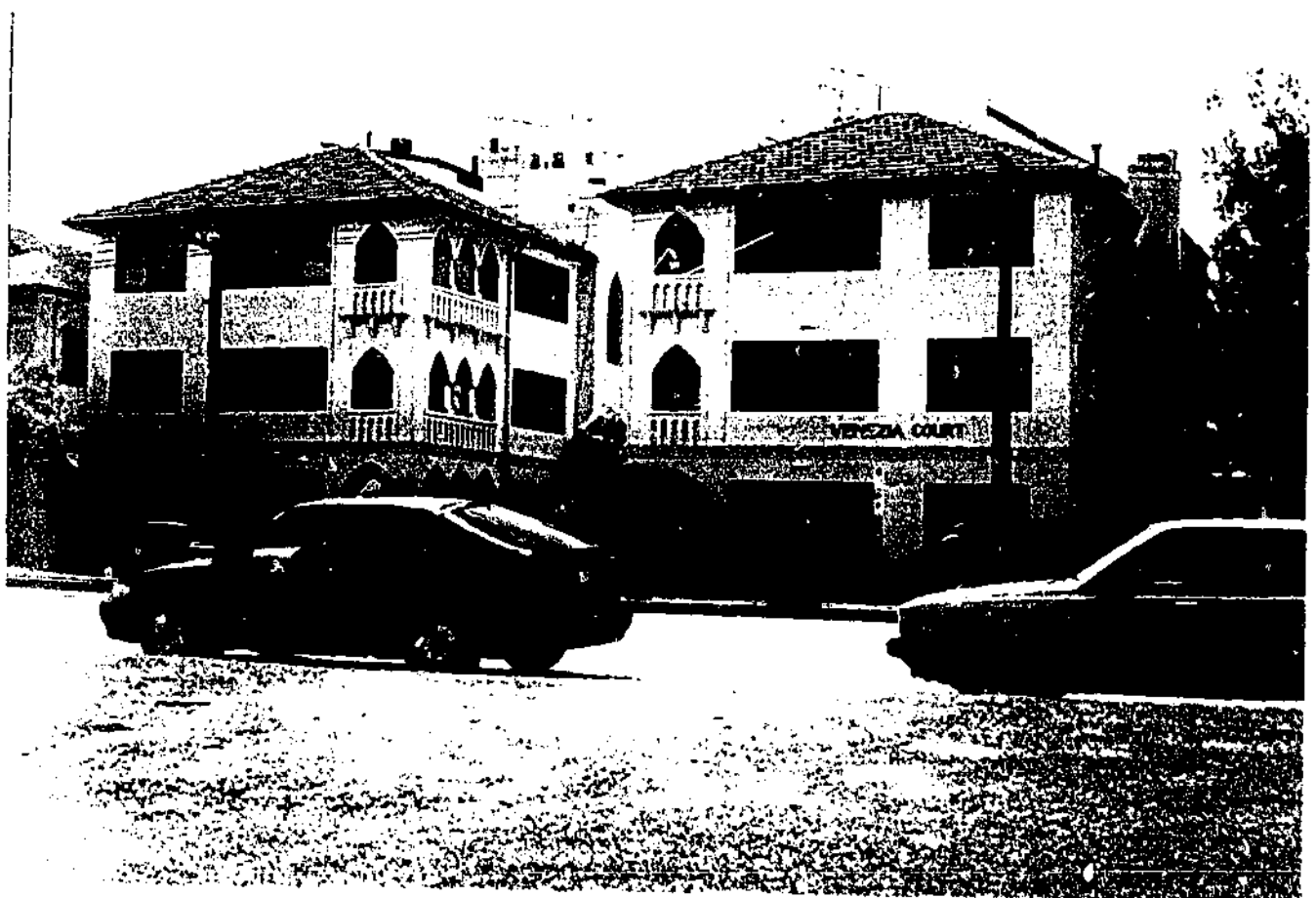**Illustration 24: Yurnga, Brighton Road, St Kilda.**

Illustration 25: Venezia Court, Beaconsfield Parade, St Kilda West.

dentist, two clerks, a gas employee, a manufacturer, a mechanic, and two commercial travellers.[71]

A sample of some of the larger blocks along the beachfront late in my period suggests that the rapid growth of flats in the late 1930s did not devalue their status. The 1940 St Kilda *Rate Books* show a wide range of occupations, but again tenants were predominantly middle-class. Monarra on the Esplanade had six residents in 1940, of whom two were females engaged in home duties. The four male tenants included a director, a manager, a carpenter, and a mining clerk. Next door at Te Aroha, there were four women and two men resident. All the women worked at home, while the two men worked as a clerk and an usher respectively. In St Kilda West's Beaconsfield Parade, the twelve flats at Biarritz housed eight male and four female tenants, one of whom, Miss Georgina Hunt, was unmarried. Of the four women only one, Elsie Odgers, a hairdresser, was listed as having an occupation outside the home.[72] The eight men held a variety of occupations, including an aeronautical engineer, a musician, a commercial traveller, and a fitter. One tenant was listed as having no occupation. Further along the Parade, Venezia Court had six female and nine male tenants listed (Illustration 25). Two of the women were employed outside the home – one as a saleswoman and the other as a manufacturer. The men included a clerk, a medical doctor, a gentleman, a civil servant and a warehouseman.

The variety of occupations of flat tenants in what were fairly high-status areas suggests that either flats gained a wide acceptability among the sections of the middle-class in interwar Melbourne, or that the Depression and War-induced housing shortage forced people to accept flats rather than houses. The occupational status of many of these tenants, however, suggests that even with severe shortages, had they desired to do so they would have been able to access their primary housing choice. Their decision to live in a flat therefore reflected a lifestyle choice. Another possibility, especially given the number of women found

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[71] PROV, VPRS 8816 P1 Unit 184.

[72] The occupation of Mrs J Steer was not listed.

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in these places, is that some of the more well-to-do, who – like Marion Aitken at Delgetti – would previously have lived in residential hotels or boarding houses, may have set up house independently in flats as these became a more available and respectable option in the interwar period. Either way, the suggestion is that the rapid growth in flat numbers resulted from the convergence of supply factors, and an increase in demand as flats became a more sought-after and desirable housing form.

All of this, however, is not to suggest that flats did not attract the bohemian, the unconventional, and groups outside Melbourne's Anglo-Protestant mainstream. A tenant of the Whitehall flats in Bank Place in the city was Margaret Strongman, a migrant from Britain, who came to Australia with a friend Lexie in the late 1930s.[73] After staying at the YWCA and in rooms in Hawthorn the two took a flat at Whitehall in late 1938. Strongman described it as 'a large building of one-roomed flatettes', that could be linked to form suites, much in the same manner as Cliveden. She and Lexie took a self-contained furnished flat on the same floor as their female friends, 'Smithy' and 'Michael'. Margaret was a busy independent woman with strong social and political convictions. She was a Quaker and quickly became involved in meetings and work with local groups after her arrival in Melbourne. She was also keen bushwalker and naturalist, spending many weekends away with groups of other women naturalists, as well attending classes at the university on several nights each week. For her, a flat appears to have been the most suitable dwelling-type because it provided independent accommodation in a group environment, thus allowing her to live her life while meeting like-minded friends and acquaintances. For someone with such a busy lifestyle, a flat was also centrally-located for her work and hobbies, and while it was 'more compact' than the place in Hawthorn, 'the conveniences [were] greater in every

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[73] SLV MS 12176, Box 2753/3, 'Diaries of Margaret Strongman, December 1937 to July 1939'; Margaret Strongman is one of Katie Holmes' subjects in her study of Australian women diarists of the 1920s and 1930s. See K. Holmes, *Spaces in Her Day*, passim.

way'.[74] Margaret married during the War and she and her husband took another flat in Jolimont for the first few years of their married life.

As with boarding houses, theatrical and artistic people were attracted to flats, perhaps because they were close to the city's theatres and galleries, and because they offered relatively comfortable short-term accommodation for people who lived a fairly transient life. The writers Vance and Nettie Palmer lived at Florida Mansions for many years after their return from London in 1936, while Gladys Moncrieff and Nellie Melba are both reputed to have lived at Ardoch in East St Kilda in the 1930s.[75] Other blocks appear to have attracted a small smattering of musicians and actors but in the main flats were more expensive to rent than rooms and so only those who were successful in their fields or were in reasonably regular work could afford to rent them. There is some evidence that landlords actively discriminated against show business people because of their unconventional behaviour and irregular incomes. John Dixon of Kia Ora Investments Pty Ltd for instance wrote to Williams and Co demanding that they take extra caution with Mr and Mrs Marcus who were 'theatrical people', and it would therefore be 'necessary to see that they do not skip on the rent'. There was a general rule at Kia Ora, Dixon wrote, that they 'did not like the idea of letting to theatrical people...without a lease, as they are only here for a short time'.[76]

In his semi-autobiographical novel *My Brother Jack*, George Johnston recalled life in a block of Melbourne's early flats, and some of the attitudes towards flats and flat-dwellers. He wrote of a visit he took with his parents one Sunday afternoon in the late teens or early 1920s to a flat his Uncle Stan – who was the black sheep of the maternal side of the family and was involved with the entertainment and gambling world – rented in St Kilda Road. Stan lived in an 'apartment of the first block of flats ever seen in Melbourne', a style of

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[74] M. Strongman, 'Diary'.

[75] On the Palmers see PROV, VPRS 8816 P1 Unit 205; For Gladys Moncreiff and Nellie Melba at Ardoch see Urban Land Authority, 'Ardoch: The Village Green', Sales Brochure, nd (c.1994).

[76] Williams and Co, Box: 1937 K–L, File: Kia Ora.

'communal living that was regarded in the somewhat staid city...as having distinctly immoral qualities'.[77] Mrs Meredith (Johnston) obviously disapproved of flat living, while Mr Meredith looked 'grim and disapproving and [made] it quite obvious to somebody that he was being forced into doing something to which he was totally opposed'. Their disapproval might have been soundly-based, as Uncle Stan's flat was full of male card players and 'three big-breasted women in blouses, who were sprawled in a kind of abandoned way in the Genoa velvet arm-chair or on the sofa....smoking cigarettes and drinking beer and making loud, laughing comments about the men'.[78]

Some tenants of flats were undoubtedly homosexual men and lesbians, although there is little in the way of direct evidence to confirm this. As we saw earlier, historians of inner city life during the interwar years have suggested that the relative anonymity and tolerance of the inner suburbs allowed individuals to engage their sexuality relatively unaccosted. Gary Wotherspoon has written that Sydney's inner suburbs were home to gays and lesbians who used the flats and boarding houses in these areas to escape 'family and peer-group pressure, and live their lives as they wanted'.[79] It is likely that the relative anonymity of flats allowed homosexual men to live their lives relatively undisturbed and in comparative safety. The same is probably true of lesbians, although it was much easier for them to go unnoticed and uncommented upon because two single women sharing a flat was relatively common and uncontroversial when, as we saw earlier, female wages were usually too low to allow a working woman to maintain a flat by herself.[80]

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[77] G. Johnston, *My Brother Jack*, Collins, Glasgow, 1978 (First published 1964), pp. 28–9; Judith Buckrich suggests that the block may have been Florida Mansions, although the evidence for this appears to be purely speculative, and given the tenant profile of the block outlined above it would appear unlikely that such behaviour would be have been tolerated for too long. See J. Buckrich, *Melbourne's Grand Boulevard*, pp. 97–8; It is also important to note that the novel is semi-fictional, and Johnston's biographer Garry Kinnane warns against assuming that all or even much of what is described, especially in the early part of the novel, actually occurred. See G. Kinnane, *George Johnston: A Biography*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1986, p. 3.

[78] G. Johnston, *My Brother Jack*.

[79] G. Wotherspoon, *'City of the Plain'*, p. 71; G. Carbery, 'Some Melbourne Beats'.

[80] R. Ford, 'Speculating on Scrapbooks, Sex and Desire'.

Some tenants disapproved of the lifestyles of their unconventional fellow tenants and complained to owners and/or managers about their behaviour. The Scotts who lived in a block of flats in Armadale complained in 1935 about the noise made by one of their fellow tenants who continually 'had very late parties', including ones in which 'dancing was continued...until early hours of the morning'. The Scotts found this 'most unfair for the other tenants' and worried that such behaviour would 'naturally lead to the flats being debarred by suitable tenants who will not put up with late parties'.[81] Later that year a resident of Trawalla in Toorak wrote to Williams and Co complaining of the noise and drunkenness associated with the ʲ·ʹends of a tenant in one of the flats below him. This incident 'was one which ⸗ ᴊɭ] occurred before', but which he had 'chosen to previously overlook'. He wrote on this occasion, however, because he felt 'that certain persons who have lately been frequenting some of the Flats (sic) at Trawalla Court, are of a most undesirable type, and are thus giving the building an extremely bad name'. He was, he wrote, considering moving somewhere else, although he did desire to remain in a flat as he found flat-living suited himself and his wife.[82]

In the same year a tenant at Berkeley Court also in Toorak, wrote to Williams' asking whether judging by the 'experience of the past two Saturday nights one might be pardoned in wondering whether they were actually living in the suburb of Toorak and whether the landlord of these flats was not being ironic at our expense when he covenanted that we should have "quiet enjoyment"'. Mr and Mrs Henderson were annoyed at the 'utter lack of consideration displayed towards the other tenants by the occupant' of flat six. The problems included noisy entertaining, 'shouting out to one another in the entrance halls and playing their radio at full blast at two am on Sunday morning'. The Hendersons were fans of flat-dwelling but argued that this type of behaviour was unusual in their

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[81] Williams and Co, Box: Bound Correspondence 1935 S–V, File: Scott.
[82] Ibid, File: Trawalla.

experience and intolerable any longer and threatened to break their tenancy agreement if nothing was done about the problem.[83]

Another cause for concern among some tenants may have been the ethnic background of some of their fellow-tenants. Flats in St Kilda and Elwood appealed to European settlers, especially Jews, some of whom moved there from Carlton and other inner northern suburbs in the 1930s. Amirah Inglis recalled such a move to Elwood by her family in 1936, suggesting the decision to live in a flat was in part motivated by her parents' devotion to modern architectural ideas and domestic conveniences, but mainly because her mother 'was still European enough to prefer a new flat to a house and still had no interest in gardening'. The family moved again a few years later, although they maintained their preference for flat-living, as did several other families who joined them from Europe in the last days before the coming of war.[84] Anne Longmire reports that some residents of St Kilda objected to the arrival of Jews in their midst and suggested that their lifestyles were alien to Australian traditions. No doubt the presence of the overseas-born amongst flat-dwellers, convinced the opponents of St Kilda's flats that such dwellings had no place in their city.[85]

Elsewhere, especially in parts of South Yarra and Toorak, flats were rented by overseas business and other migrants here for short-term secondments. Most were English or American and thus caused no real concern, but some flats were let to foreign governments as consulates or as residences for consulate staff. The Chinese Government for instance rented a flat in Domain Road, South Yarra in the early 1930s and appear to have used it as a consulate.[86] In 1936 the letting of a Toorak maisonette to a Japanese family caused consternation among other tenants. The Scott family of Scott Bros Textile Distributors wrote to Williams and Co concerned about their new neighbours: 'We have nothing but respect for these

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[83] Ibid, Box: Bound Correspondence 1935 M–R, File: O'Mahoney.

[84] A. Inglis, *Amirah An UnAustralian Childhood*, pp. 68 and 113–116.

[85] A. Longmire, *St Kilda*, pp. 107–110.

[86] Williams and Co, Box: Bound Correspondence OL–R 1934, File: Parrington Estate.

people', they wrote, 'still the fact remains that they are a different nationality with different ideals and customs to our own'. The Scotts considered this to be a real problem in flats 'where so much of the property is common to both tenants'. They felt they should have been consulted about these tenants and threatened to move out if nothing was done. Williams agreed, pointing out that they did not let the flat, and had in fact advised the owner 'not to accept them as tenants'.[87]

Conclusion

The image of flats and flat-dwellers presented by the popular media and accepted in much of the popular imagination, often bore little resemblance to the lives led by flat dwellers. The image portrayed was either of openly immoral single men and women, or of frivolous childless couples living life in the fast lane of the modern world. A third, although less common image was of the idle rich aping their peers in North America by taking up flat-living and urban pursuits and pastimes. But social profiles of flat-dwellers suggest it is likely that most didn't live fast or bohemian lives. Although most were wealthier than the average Melburnian, it is unlikely that the majority considered themselves overly rich, or felt their lifestyles too far removed from those of the rest of the population. Flats did appeal to the rich, idle or otherwise, and were certainly favoured by some members of a social set devoted to parties, entertainment and socialising, and to those who wished to live an urban-oriented lifestyle. They also appealed to those whose social, sexual or ethnic orientation meant that they chose or were forced to live outside the boundaries of mainstream society. But the majority of flat-dwellers probably chose this type of accommodation because flats were a new, comfortable and convenient solution to their housing needs. Flats also became one of the few accommodation options open to older single women as boarding houses became less pleasant and less respectable as the century wore on.

The concerns raised in some sections of the media and in the popular imagination about flats and flat-dwellers were a manifestation of the issues I have discussed

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[87] Ibid, Box: Bound Correspondence 1936 A and B, File: Armstrong.

throughout this thesis about what we as Australians do about those whose circumstances or lifestyle choices put them outside the norm of the nuclear family dwelling in its own, preferably detached, home. That many of the residents of these places were also unattached females fuelled these concerns and raised long-standing issues about appropriate behaviour for women. There was also an element of racism and xenophobia involved, but I suspect the issue of the foreign-born or non-Anglo-Saxons choosing to live in these places probably simply convinced other Australians that this type of accommodation was not for them. Commentators in some sections of the media spoke out against flats because they felt they were likely to undermine Australia's national character. Had they not been against flats, and had the general public known the truth about who lived in these places and why, it is still unlikely that flats would have been more popular. It is also unlikely that any reasonable and dispassionate discussion of the issues would have made much of a difference to people's attitudes to flats and flat-dwellers. This debate, like many of the others discussed in this thesis was more about perceptions than reality. The perception was that flats were the 'other' and somehow un-Australian. The debate therefore was not so much about what was, rather than was thought to be. Flats were simply the physical manifestation of wider societal debates about what was Australian and how Australians should live in the twentieth century.

Chapter Eight

Flat Owners and their Properties

Introduction

Flats became a common feature of the urban landscape, especially in the inner south and eastern suburbs in the interwar years. Although normally more expensive to rent than rooms or small houses, flats appealed to tenants on a number of grounds, including convenience, modernity, and safety and security – often in sought-after locations near the city. They were attractive because they were new or nearly so, wired for electricity and other modern services, and featured many of the latest decor ideas such as built-in cupboards, drawers and some kitchen and dining-room furniture. The first wave of flat builders advertised these latest decorator features in their blocks, and flat supporters argued that they took away the problems of maintaining a large old house – including the costs of heating large rooms and paying for servants. In the interwar years flats were also sought-after because they were light and bright, with many of them designed along Modernist lines and featuring large windows and in some cases glass brick walls that captured views and natural light and warmth

Flats were attractive investment options for much the same reasons. Because most flats were new or nearly-so and therefore free from many of the costs of maintenance they were popular with amateur and small-scale landlords looking for passive forms of investment, especially in the wake of the stockmarket crash of 1929. Investors also used flats to attempt to capture increases in land value in the inner suburbs as the large house set in extensive grounds became increasingly unpopular in the interwar years. However, if as some contended, flats were somehow un-Australian or led to immoral behaviour, then the owners of flats could also become suspect and open to charges of promoting immorality and undermining Melbourne's social and civic traditions. Flat owners, like their tenants, therefore had to be sure that their investments reflected well upon

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themselves and did not undermine their social status and respectability. Because flats were expensive to buy and in some cases maintain, ordinary logic would suggest that rather than being owned by slumlords or the morally dubious, flats were more likely to have formed a separate but reasonably common subset of the wider property market. Owners, like many of their tenants, were therefore more likely to come from the ranks of the comfortable than from the poor and/or disrespectable.

Virtually all of Melbourne's interwar blocks of flats were held on a single title, owned either by a single proprietor or a partnership of individuals. Some blocks were owned by institutions or proprietary companies, although the involvement of these groups in the market was minor until the mid–1930s. A small number of flats were owned individually through the use of company title, although this was limited. Most occupiers rented their flats and so most blocks were built or held as investments by owners in order to provide an income from rents and, ultimately for the security and capital gains property has been seen to traditionally provide. Flats were not used for short-term speculation as is often the case today when quite often blocks are bought up and refurbished before individual units are sold off for quick profit.[1]

In the absence of the detailed census records which allow American and other historians to re-create in reasonably precise detail the family patterns and living arrangements of households, the best option for Australian historians who wish to study these issues is to use municipal Rate Books that to greater and lesser degrees, describe dwellings, room numbers and give some characteristics of owners. To this end, as with the discussion of the locations of boarding houses and flats, and the occupations of tenants of both in previous chapters, I have used

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[1] See C. Hamnett and B. Randolph, 'The Rise and Fall', and their later book *Cities, Housing and Profits*, for a discussion of London's flat market and the actions of what they call 'flat-breakers' – individuals or companies who bought-up whole blocks and quickly on-sold them to individual purchasers at great profit – in the 1960s and 1970s.

these books as a source of information on the owners of purpose-built flats in the Cities of Melbourne and St Kilda – at five yearly intervals from 1920 to 1945.[2]

Another useful source of information about flat owners are the records held by Williams and Co, a long-established South Yarra real estate firm that became heavily involved in advising investors on the buying and selling of flats from the late 1920s. They also acted as managers of flats, collecting rents, supervising maintenance and organising the day-to-day administration of blocks of flats. Williams and Co mainly operated in South Yarra, Prahran and Toorak, so their records mostly involve owners and blocks in those areas, although they did manage one or two blocks in St Kilda and East Melbourne.[3] These records detail some patterns of ownership, but mostly they provide us with information about the reasons individuals and companies invested in flats in the interwar years. They also inform us of the levels of financial return these investors were able to achieve in otherwise depressed economic circumstances.

Facilities and Conveniences.

Why did tenants, many who could have afforded to live where they liked, opt for flats over houses? Why were they not only prepared to pay high rents, but also put up with the potential slur and innuendo about their lifestyles and morals to live in these places? The first and most obvious reason was that flats were smaller than houses and therefore less of a physical and economic strain to manage. But by the 1920s and the coming of the Californian Bungalow, there was no real need to have a retinue of servants to manage a house, as these dwellings were designed to be run without help or with only one or two servants. Part of the reason why flats were popular was that developers and owners catered for the whims and the demands for luxuries from tenants by providing finishes and services that were not commonly available in ordinary houses at this time. Electricity, gas, and other services were provided as a matter of course, and in later years resident caretakers

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[2] The following discussion is based on my 'Flat Life in Melbourne'.

[3] Williams and Co Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.

were employed to cater to the needs and security of tenants. These were popular with tenants. But flats were also sought after because they were more likely to be in a convenient location close to the city than were new houses on the suburban fringe, and therefore appealed to people who had tired of the long daily commute to their city workplaces. For a variety of reasons, flats also appealed to those who wished to live an urban-oriented life in the inner suburbs.

Promoters of flats argued that they represented modernity and perhaps heralded the coming of American or European sophistication to Melbourne. The image of flat-dwellers, especially as presented by the advertising industry, was that of bright, sophisticated young singles and couples living an urbane existence, perhaps modelled on New York or Hollywood. A full-page advertisement for furniture retailers, Johnston's Pty Ltd in *Table Talk* in 1921 featured a smart young couple who had just moved into their own 'modern flat' (Illustration 30).[4] The female partner described their flat as '[t]he nattiest little home imaginable'. She and her husband Jack were 'absurdly happy, ridiculously content, just wallowing in the comfy, irresistible little flat we have'. They were obviously meant to represent a new type of young couple – reasonably well-off, sophisticated, and at least temporarily childless. The female partner was also presented as frivolous and a bit 'scatty', perhaps an exemplar of the carefree 'new woman' of the Jazz Age. She and her husband Jack would have 'our little flings now and then – go on the "Jazz", as Jack says; a little dinner, a show perhaps, and back to our cosy wee nook to find everything just as enticing, natty and alluring as the first day Jack and I started our little bit of Heaven'. A similar advertisement from the same firm a month or so later featured an image of another modern young couple crossing a road lined with two- and three-storey flats. They too, were on their way to Johnston's to view 'Furniture ideal for Flat life'.[5]

After a series of articles about flats in the *Australian Home Builder* in the mid–1920s, a female journalist who had lived in several flats over the years wrote

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[4] *Table Talk*, 14 July 1921.
[5] Ibid, 11 August 1921.

about what she would do if she 'were building a flat'. Her criticisms mainly centred on the kitchen, and essentially involved installing modern labour-saving gadgets in order to reduce the drudgery of housework. In designing her ideal flat she said, 'there are several little devices I would install that would almost halve the work'. Most of these involved building-in cupboards and storage space, as well as making preparation and cleaning areas more ergonomic.[6] A year later *Home Beautiful* featured a proposal for a new eight-storey block in Fitzroy Street, St Kilda that was said to be 'designed in such palatial, comfortable and exclusive fashion', that it was likely to drag even the most dedicated home lover from their private houses. Berkeley Court, which was never built, was described in radiant tones, with its appointments lavishly praised:

> Its catalogue of amenities begins with garbage incinerators and ends with wireless sets for every tenancy. Such common conveniences as telephones to every suite and gas stoves in every kitchen are included as a matter of course. In addition there are built-in wardrobes and cupboards, radiators, ironing boards, central heating throughout, a general hall and lounge, hairdressers and commodity shops, private postal box, and a kitchen and general cafe providing every culinary necessity and luxury.[7]

The article said the building 'will rise to the standard of the very best American residential apartment houses', and could, the writer believed, 'predicate a rapid conversion of Melburnians to apartment house living'.

As flats became more common in the 1930s this stress on amenity grew. Former critic of flats, Nora Cooper argued in 1933 that 'the "modern flat" is fast coming into serious competition with the similarly sized suburban house', and 'it can sometimes show superiority in the matter of cupboards and minor fittings'.[8] She then went on to list those fittings provided as a matter of course in 'better-class modern flats'. These included, refrigerators, built-in baths, built-in dressers and sinks in kitchens, which were also fitted with

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[6] *Australian Home Builder*, 15 September 1925.

[7] *Australian Home Beautiful*, 5 July 1926.

[8] Ibid, 2 October 1933.

up-to-date gas or electric stoves in tiled recesses; and ventilated cupboards for food and groceries. Lighting fixtures include shaving mirror and dressing table lights, and probably one over the cooking stove as well, all of which mean extra expense to install in the suburban house.

Cooper also stressed the increasing demand for small, compact bachelor flats. These, she said, were indicative of new lifestyle options that provided 'a comfortable little home for one or two persons, in charming surroundings, which can be run with a minimum of effort', and leave 'plenty of time to devote to professional or other interests, yet without sacrificing any of the comforts necessary to dignified living'. She also noted that these places were 'a significant sign of the times', as they appealed to women who 'are practising avocations other than housekeeping', and are 'doing work sufficiently well-paid to enable them to enjoy an up-to-date little home of their own'. So flats were modern, sophisticated, and perhaps a harbinger of a new urban and less socially-restrictive way of life for affluent young singles and couples.[9]

Advertisements for flats to let in the daily press would also stress their comfort, convenience and services. Newly completed flats in Fitzroy Street, St Kilda were advertised in the *Argus* in 1921 as '[e]ntirely self contained' and 'fitted with hall, kitchen, bathroom, heater, gas-stove, laundry, gas copper, and electric light'.[10] Three years later new flats in Toorak were described as 'perfectly appointed SC [self-contained] flats', featuring '[t]wo spacious reception-rooms, three bedrooms, large sleep-out, bathroom, kitchenette, gas stove, hot-water service, telephones, every possible modern convenience'.[11] In the late 1920s and the 1930s the advertisements became more descriptive as the flats became more luxurious. Advertisements also stressed how modern the flats were, and how representative of a supposedly new era of comfort and technology. Hawsleigh Court in East St Kilda for instance was declared on completion in 1929 to be 'positively up to date' and 'the most up-to-date in Melbourne'. The 'just built' Ritz in Marine

[9] Ibid.

[10] Mentor House, *Argus*, 25 June 1921.

[11] Ibid, 28 June 1924.

Parade was described using exactly the same words in January 1930. This 'most up-to-date' block featured 'frigidaires, central heating and hot water service', in all flats.[12]

In later years the latest technological advances were stressed in kitchen fittings, and importantly so was sound-proofing and other methods of ensuring tenant privacy. One new block in Tennyson Street, St Kilda was described as having 'the very latest kitchen with mono-metal sink', while a block in Powlett Street, East Melbourne was described as 'new sound-proof exclusive flats', that ensured comfort and privacy.[13] Privacy had obviously become an issue as architects moved away from the single-stair entrance common in small blocks in the 1920s, to the larger grouped-stairwell and deck-access Modernist blocks that became more prevalent in the 1930s.[14] An advertisement for Hawsleigh Court stressed that each of the flats 'HAS ITS OWN PRIVATE ENTRANCE', while other advertisements stressed how few flats shared a single entrance, thus ensuring privacy, individuality and presumably more anonymity than was provided by blocks that shared a single entrance.[15]

When advertising their flats to potential tenants, estate agents Williams and Co stressed their comfort, convenience and security. This was especially true during the Depression when flats were difficult to let and tenants found themselves able to dictate their requirements in a buyers' market. But it also remained the case to a certain extent throughout the 1930s, perhaps suggesting that because flats were aimed at the middle- and upper-middle-class, the company felt obliged to provide a level of service better than they would for tenants across the river in Richmond or Collingwood. In October 1932 Mrs Marks of Brighton was advised that Burnham in Grange Road, Toorak was nearing completion and that she was invited as a prospective tenant to inspect them. The owner was said to be 'putting

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[12] *Argus*, 29 June 1929; *Age*, 31 January 1930.

[13] *Argus*, 5 January 1935; *Age*, 29 June 1935.

[14] Also see the discussion of Pat Counihan's attitudes to stairwells and entrances in the previous chapter.

the best of fittings into the flats and they will be most comfortable when completed'.[16] Similarly a year later Williams' wrote to a Mr Cole Junior of Collins Street advising him that a flat was about to become vacant at 'the well known and favoured building of flats Abercarn' in South Yarra. Abercarn was described as being in 'the famous Maritimo Estate...touching both Boys and Girls Grammar Schools, Botanical Gardens, and within walking distance of the city'. The vacant flat which was upstairs and had a private balcony consisted of six 'well planned rooms with the very latest appointments throughout', including two 'tiled bathrooms, well equipped kitchen with nook...central heating and hot water service' supplied by the owner.[17]

Williams' attempted to hype the residential rental market whenever new flats became available. They produced a continually-updated book of flats available for rent, and after having gained the contract to manage a block – especially one that was still under construction – would set about advertising it by 'blitzing' the market with news of its features and appointments. A board would be erected outside the block, newspaper advertisements taken out, and letters sent to potential clients advising them of the upcoming release of the flats.[18] When the new flats Kia Ora in St Kilda Road (Illustration 27) were nearing completion in 1936, for example, a flat furnished by Ackman's furniture stores, was opened as a display unit to entice potential tenants to sign up.[19] The company also wrote to about fifty prospective tenants it had on its books with details of features and rents of the flats. Mrs FJ Alderson of Armadale, for instance, was advised that the 'flats

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[15] *Argus*, 29 June 1929.

[16] Williams and Co, File: CG Borrett, Burnham.

[17] Ibid, File: Rankin.

[18] Sometimes the advertising board would offend the sensibilities of neighbours or current tenants, one of two of whom found this sort of thing vulgar, 'common and third rate'. Ibid, File: Ryan, Letter from Elsie Austin to owner of Darrawood, Mr P Ryan, 16 October 1932.

[19] Display homes had been introduced to Melbourne and perhaps Australia in the early 1930s by the AV Jennings Company which included a fully-furnished house, with gas appliances throughout, in its Beauville Estate in Murrumbeena, opened in 1933. These houses were for sale but the idea of a display rental flat open for inspection by prospective tenants, would appear to be a derivation of the same idea. On Jennings' see Don Garden, *Builders to the Nation: The AV Jennings Story*, MUP, Melbourne, 1992, p. 29; On display homes see S. O'Hanlon, 'Home and Hearth', in D. Dunstan (ed), *Victorian Icon: The Royal Exhibition Building Melbourne*, Exhibition

are beautifully appointed throughout and are fitted with the very latest labour-saving devices'. The flats were said to feature 'nicely equipped' kitchens and bathrooms, and the block had 'efficient continuous hot water service and central heating...which is supplied by the owner free of any cost to the tenants'.[20]

Individual flats and whole blocks came with appointments and services that made flat-living quite luxurious and therefore more attractive living prospects than many houses. As well as internal finishes and conveniences, live-in caretakers would cater to tenants' everyday needs and carry out minor repairs. Most blocks provided tenants with free hot water, mainly because individual hot water services were generally unavailable or prohibitively expensive. Tenants were also provided with refrigerators, stoves, gas wall-heating or, in the more luxurious blocks, central heating. Some flats came with carpets and some other floor-coverings supplied, while others came with blinds and other window fittings as standard.[21] But it was the personal services provided that made flat life similar to what the well-to-do had previously experienced in their mansions. Williams' offered its owner clients a service that they said would enable them to attract and keep tenants. The company also provided services to tenants once they had agreed to rent a flat. It would approach the gas, electricity and telephone companies to organise the connection of these services in the tenant's name. The tenants, therefore simply had to move in and enjoy their flat.

Many of the new blocks came with communal laundries and places to dry clothes. The company assigned tenants a washing day, which they were expected to adhere to reasonably rigidly, or face trouble with their fellow tenants.[22] The agency also had a 'service whereby a landlord may have his or her garden cared

Trustees, Melbourne, 1996, pp. 360–362.

[20] Williams and Co, Box: Flats 1937, File: A.

[21] Joan (Merle) Manton, Interview, Caulfield, 10 September 1997.

[22] Williams wrote to Mrs Brown at Flat 10 Dulverton in 1937 advising her that she had been reassigned Tuesday as her laundry day in order to 'eliminate [the] trouble that ha[d] occurred with washing facilities', between her and a fellow tenant. Williams and Co, Box: Bound Correspondence 1937 D–G, File: Dulverton; Joan Manton, the niece of South Yarra flat developer, Alan Hone confirms that at her uncle's blocks tenants were assigned a particular

for in a first class manner, the exterior stairways and pathways kept clean, [and] the hot water service kept stoked and looked after'.[23] Tenants could approach the caretaker to have minor repairs carried out. The live-in caretaker or a gardener would also take care of the premises and ensure that the block was well-kept, thus ensuring it maintained its social status. When problems emerged in this area both tenants and the owners would complain about the state of the building, perhaps fearing that their social status was under threat. Miss E. Hedges, the owner of Winslow in Toorak, for instance wrote to Williams' complaining that the caretaker Mr Eaton was doing a poor job and was 'disgusted with the way [the block was] being looked after'.[24]

Many tenants appear to have resided in their flats for reasonably short periods of time, usually for only a few years, perhaps before infirmity overtook them, or before children arrived, or perhaps a decision was made to move into more traditional accommodation. Others stayed for short periods because they were on secondment to Melbourne for business or other purposes, and they used furnished flats in preference to a hotel or boarding house for the duration of their stay. But, as we have seen, there were a number of people who stayed on in their flats for years. One of the reasons for this was the level of service and comfort flats provided. Wealthier tenants would stay in flats even when they obviously had the ability to buy a small house. Some would even maintain their tenancy while out of the city or country for extended periods. They thus formed a European or American-style class of long-term renters.[25] Other tenants were country or

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washing day. Joan Manton, Interview.

[23] Williams and Co, Box: Bound Correspondence, File: Devon; Caretaking appears to have been one of the few employment growth areas in the early 1930s. The Williams files have many letters from potential caretakers seeking work, and the company appears to have kept a file where names were recorded. Some caretakers were day workers while many others lived in, and thus gained accommodation and employment at the same time.

[24] Ibid, Bound Correspondence 1937 W–Z, File: Winslow.

[25] Various studies of the English and North American middle-classes have shown that in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries at least, many of them did not own their own homes, preferring to rent on an ongoing basis, in part because their salaries did not allow them to service a mortgage at the same time as maintaining a middle-class lifestyle. Continental Europeans have long preferred to rent an apartment rather than own their own home. On North America see among others T. Hareven, 'The Home and the Family in Historical Perspective', p. 270, K Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, esp. Chs. 4 and 5, M. Marsh, *Suburban Lives*, esp. Chs. 3 and 4; On

interstate people who maintained a flat as their Melbourne base. Tenants who wished to leave their flats for extended periods would sub-let, often including their furniture in the sub-lease. They were thus able to maintain their flat should they wish to eventually return to it, and at the same time store their furniture without having to pay extra to do so.

In contrast with today, real estate agents would accept and promote the sub-letting of flats to third parties. Williams' brokered these sorts of arrangements which sometimes lasted for years on end. Head tenants would leave their furniture and effects – sometimes including their crockery and manchester – and this would be taken over by the sub-tenants while the other travelled or simply lived somewhere else. In April 1937, for instance, Williams' sub-let flat thirty-seven at Kia Ora to Joseph Boalt for twelve months. An inventory of the fittings included in the sub-lease shows that books, sheets, pillow cases, towels and serviettes were included along with the more expected furnishings, carpets and curtains etc.[26] The owner of Kia Ora, John Dixon presumably explicitly approved of sub-letting as in 1932 he had asked Williams' to arrange a sub-tenant for his daughter who wished to vacate her flat at California Mansions in Dandenong Road before the lease was completed.[27] Other head-tenants appear to have let out their flats during the Depression and moved into boarding house accommodation. One such tenant was Mrs Parbury of Toorak Road, Toorak who let her flat fully furnished at £5/15/6 per week to JA Tallis Esq while she moved into The Oaks in Park Street, South Yarra, perhaps to save money during the downturn.[28]

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middle-class home-ownership versus renting in Britain see A. Jackson, *Semi-Detached London*, esp. Ch. 2, 'Suburbia'; On twentieth century Continental European home-ownership rates see P. Troy, *The Benefits of Owner Occupation*, Urban Research Program Working Paper No. 29, December 1991, p. 8.

[26] Williams and Co, Box: Inventories, File: Kia Ora.

[27] Ibid, File: Trawalla.

[28] Ibid, File: Mr Parbury.

COMFY FURNITURE
for the MODERN FLAT

The Nattiest Little Home Imaginable

HERE we live, Jack and I, absurdly happy, ridiculously content, just wallowing in the comfy, irresistible little flat we have.

Oh, yes! We have our little flings now and then—go on the "Jazz," as Jack says; a little dinner, a show perhaps, and back to our cosy wee nook to find everything just as enticing, natty and alluring as the first day Jack and I started our little bit of Heaven.

We have bonza thrilling little parties, too, everyone merry, cute and jolly. Jack reckons they couldn't be anything else with our wonderful environment. And we hadn't the finest scrap of trouble in choosing things, either!

You see, we simply dawdled along to Johnston's, crowded round the vast showrooms (where I started to want everything I saw) and a kind man showed us our little flat all complete.

We went into ecstacies over it, and still do, though it's no longer with those marvellous people, but right here, helping to make our friends green with envy and Jack and I as proud as a couple of roosters. We have only a couple of rooms, but, believe me, they're like a palace!

Bachelors and All Living in Single Blessedness

Will likewise gain the keenest benefit in our ideally designed Flat Furniture and Furnishings. By their aid, the comfort and facilities of large, luxurious homes can be enjoyed with the untold advantages of economy and independence. Will you not accept our cordial invitation to inspect, and so see for yourself our Completely Furnished Flats which are now being exhibited at our Showrooms?

JOHNSTON'S Pty. Ltd.   GERTRUDE STREET FITZROY, MELBOURNE

**Illustration 26: Advertisement, 'Comfy Furniture for the Modern Flat',
Johnston's Furniture Pty Ltd, 1921.**
Source: *Table Talk*, 14 July 1921.

Illustration 27: Kia Ora, St Kilda Road, Melbourne.

Illustration 28: Hayling, Grey Street, East Melbourne.

Illustration 29: Gladswood Gardens, Domain Road, South Yarra.

Illustration 30: Beverley Hills, Darling Street South Yarra.

Flat Ownership

Owners of flats were a reasonably diverse group but some discernible patterns and types began to become apparent in the 1920s, and even more so in the 1930s. Most owners held only one or two blocks, although as the century wore on larger holdings became more common. Women were over-represented relative to their general level of ownership of property, although this perhaps simply reflected the fact that many female flat owners were unmarried and thus held their properties in their own right. Women were also over-represented as occupiers of flats, which suggests that the growth of the flat market may have been a response to the general increase in the numbers of unmarried women in Victoria in the interwar years.[29] The middle-class were similarly over-represented as owners of flats, as were certain types of professionals such as medical practitioners and financiers. Owners of flats overwhelmingly came – as would be expected – from the middle- and upper-classes, with business families appearing to use investments in flats as a safe and secure investment outlet for their surplus profits, especially in the Depression of the 1930s.

What is evident is a similarity between interwar flat owners, and the wider profile of Melbourne landlords in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as found by Tony Dingle and David Merrett. Their research found that landlords in both working- and middle-class areas tended to be the neighbours – and possibly the friends – of their tenants. They argued that many of Melbourne's landlords were small operators who 'usually resided in close proximity to their rental properties', and felt an affinity with the area, sometimes acting in a leadership role in the local community.[30] Very often they were local councillors or businesspeople, such as real estate agents or shopkeepers. Terry Griggs' study of Port Melbourne's early twentieth century landlords has suggested that a similar

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[29] See P. McDonald, *Marriage in Australia: Age at First Marriage and Proportions Marrying 1860–1971*, Australian Family Formations Project, Monograph No. 2, ANU, Canberra, 1974; Also see discussion of women as flat owners below.

[30] AE Dingle and DT Merrett, 'Urban Landlords', p. 12.

situation existed there, as has Bernard Barrett' research into Collingwood and Fitzroy in the nineteenth century.[31]

Research into inner Melbourne's interwar flats shows that this market bore many similarities to that for houses, although the issue of scale confuses the issue somewhat. The average holding of flats in the Albert Ward of the City of Melbourne in 1945, for example was 9.3 per individual or company, while in St Kilda West in the same year it was 7.8.[32] These figures, however, hide some significant variations, with the Albert Ward number especially suspect because of the large size of St Kilda Road's blocks. The St Kilda West average is also distorted by the number of small two- and three-flat blocks in some of the streets running between Grey and Acland Streets. Most non-institutional owners, however, had only one block, or at best two small blocks, and so while they resembled Melbourne's other landlords in that they often lived in their blocks or in nearby areas, the fact that in some cases their blocks may have contained five-to-ten flats with perhaps ten or fifteen tenants, puts them in the scale of reasonably large landlords in a city dominated by small holdings.[33]

While most owners of flats held only one or two blocks, larger holdings and ownership of flats by members of commercial families made an appearance in both the Cities of Melbourne and St Kilda from the late 1930s.[34] Harold Coles, of the optometry firm Coles and Garrard, for instance, owned three blocks containing twenty-seven flats in South Yarra, including St Ann's on the corner of Park Street and Toorak Road West, from 1940.[35] The 1945 MCC *Rate Books* also show that various members of the Ryan family (Hugh, Frank and Patrick),

[31] T. Griggs, 'Landlord and Tenant Relations, Melbourne 1860–1980', Unpublished PhD Thesis, La Trobe University, 1994, p. 60; B. Barrett, *The Inner Suburbs*, Ch. 2, 'The Birth of Two Suburbs'.

[32] Personal calculations based on those blocks I have designated as purpose-built in Chapter Six.

[33] Dingle and Merrett found that in Hawthorn's Yarra Ward in 1911, for example, only nine landlords out of 397 owned more than five properties. The average holding was only 1.7 properties. See 'Urban Landlords', p. 7.

[34] On commercial families see below.

[35] L. Oscar Slater, *Walking Tour of South Yarra West*, p. 38.

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dairymen of Malvern, owned eighty-five flats between them in the City of Melbourne, while Bertram and Robert Whittaker, manufacturers of Hawthorn, owned twenty-six flats in three blocks in South Yarra.[36] The Sandner family also owned fifty-five flats in two blocks in St Kilda Road, although these were held in a variety of guises.[37] In Travencore, Shirley Limb appears to have owned half of Mooltan Street – being listed as the owner of twenty flats in four blocks from number 117 to number 135.

Another noticeable trend from the mid–1930s was the movement of institutional investors into the flat market. The largest of these was Southern Cross Assurance which owned at least five blocks in St Kilda's Central Ward in the mid–1930s. It also bought Lochley, a block of eight flats in Loch Street, St Kilda from five members of the Kirton family in 1937.[38] The 1940 *Rate Books* show that they also owned thirty-six flats in six blocks in South Yarra and another forty-two in two large blocks in Parkville. By 1945 Southern Cross Assurance had developed into quite a large landlord with 144 flats in nine blocks in the City of Melbourne alone.[39] Similarly Brookwood Estates Pty Ltd owned fifty-five flats in two blocks in East Melbourne, as well as Brookwood in Queens Road.[40] Institutions were not as strongly represented in St Kilda as Melbourne, but some large insurance companies did have a presence. Kingsclere in Fitzroy Street, for example, was owned at various times by City Mutual Life and Eagle Star Insurance.

Also noticeable from the late 1920s, but especially in the 1930s was the presence of investment companies in the flat market. This may simply reflect Company Share ownership, but it could also point to the attractiveness of flats as an

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[36] Williams and Co files show that the Ryans also owned other blocks in Prahran.

[37] In 1940 445 St Kilda Road was listed as being owned by Rosa Sandner, an owner-occupier. In 1945 it was owned by RS Investments Pty Ltd, while another block further down St Kilda Road at number 545 was owned by Adolph Sandner Investments Co. Pty Ltd.

[38] Williams and Co Collection, Box: Bound Correspondence 1937 K–L, File: Lochley.

[39] The *Argus'* 'Financial and Commercial Supplement' suggested in a discussion of the flat market in 1940 that 'several life assurance companies have entered this field', and that this was driving up land prices, *Argus*, 8 February 1940.

[40] See C. Hamnett and B. Randolph, 'Rise and Fall', and *Cities, Housing and Profits* for similar

investment option for large financial and other companies at this time.[41] Richard Dennis's study of Toronto's interwar flats found similar developments there. In the 1920s, he says 'the scale of apartment houses increased' and consequently the costs of developing them meant that the market moved out of the hands of small entrepreneurs and therefore 'corporate ownership became more important, often involving financial interests in cities such as Detroit and New York'.[42] The involvement of insurance and investment companies in Melbourne's flats may have been an example of similar forces emerging here, although, as discussed below, it is probably more a reflection of the limited investment options available in the 1930s.

The virtual cessation of residential building, including the building of flats after war-time controls were instituted in 1941 led to a reluctance by investors to commit to rental properties because of rent controls.[43] Southern Cross Assurance responded in the late 1940s by divesting itself of virtually all its properties to family-based groups, largely I suspect, because it felt it could get better returns investing in other outlets.[44] Similarly Brookwood Estates had disposed of Thorlinda Mansions to William Drewer, but maintained ownership of Regents Court and Brookwood. Against this postwar trend, however, Colonial Mutual Life bought Castle Towers at 11–21 Marne Street, South Yarra formerly owned privately by William Kemball. One or two other formerly privately-held blocks were also listed as having institutional ownership, but this may simply reflect

events in London during this period.

[41] Examples include two blocks containing eight flats in Charnwood Grove owned by 'Lorraine Investments Pty Ltd' of 37 Swanston Street, a block of four flats in Westbury Street, East St Kilda owned by 'City and Suburban Investments Pty Ltd', and a block of five flats and a shop at 75 and 75a Fitzroy Street owned by 'Investors Pty Ltd'.

[42] R. Dennis, 'Interpreting the apartment house', p. 318.

[43] L. Frost and T. Dingle, 'Sustaining Suburbia: An Historical Perspective on Australia's Urban Growth', in P. Troy (ed), *Australian Cities: Issues, Strategies and Policies for Urban Australia in the 1990s*, CUP, Melbourne, 1995, p. 36.

[44] PROV, VPRS 5708 Unit 121; Examples of these family groups includes the Houghton's, one of whose members was Doris Syme, who bought 30 George Street, East Melbourne, and Abraham and Rachel Leibler who bought 27–29 Millswyn Street, South Yarra, from Southern Cross; Hamnett and Randolph discuss the similar divestment by institutional investors of flats in London in favour of more lucrative stocks. There, however, the practice didn't occur at any great rate until the 1960s. See 'The Rise and Fall', pp. 170–1.

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individuals incorporating themselves or blocks being converted to company-title ownership.

Women As Owners

As well as the large numbers of young middle-class women who came to the city in search of work in the interwar years discussed in earlier chapters, there was also an excess number of single early middle-aged women in Melbourne in this period. Demographer Peter McDonald has calculated that by 1921 in Victoria, twenty-one per cent of women in the age group 45–49 had never married. For males of the same age the figure was eighteen per cent. These women, born in the 1870s, were the children of the generation who became affluent during the land-boom years of the 1880s. They came of age during the 1890s Depression when Victoria's population declined as young men especially left the colony to seek their fortunes elsewhere.[45] Norma McArthur suggests that the numbers of single women in Victoria could well have been higher than was the case because many single men and women left the colony in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. Even so the largest exodus was of young single men.[46] The chances of women born in the 1870s ever marrying was further diminished by the carnage of the First World War, which killed off thousands of men who might have otherwise married later in life than usual. These women may also of course have remained single out of choice. Katie Holmes has argued that in the teens and the 1920s many women took advantage of the new employment opportunities and social freedoms open to them, and chose to pursue careers outside the home in preference to marriage.[47]

Whatever their reasons for remaining single, it is likely that many of these large numbers of unattached women in Victoria would have come into inheritances

[45] P. McDonald, *Marriage in Australia.*

[46] N. McArthur, 'Net Migration to Australian Colonies and States, 1881–1911', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 3, No. 1, April 1967, pp. 64–6.

[47] K. Holmes, '"Spinsters Indispensable": Feminists, Single Women and the Critique of Marriage, 1890–1920', *Australian Historical Studies*, 110, April 1998, esp. pp. 74–6.

from their parents' estates in the interwar years. It is likely that many of them, either alone or in association with sisters and brothers, would have seen residential property as the most suitable place to invest this money. Blocks of flats appear to have been seen by many of them as the most appropriate residential investment. Across Melbourne rate book records show that blocks of flats were often owned by siblings, in many cases sisters. Martin Daunton has argued that in nineteenth century Britain, families would invest in residential property in order to 'provide an income for retirement and subsequently for widows and unmarried daughters'.[48] Residential investments that were 'secure and local' were considered particularly appropriate for unmarried daughters because they were reasonably passive forms of investment that required little knowledge of business, or expenditure of time and money on day-to-day administration. They essentially formed a *rentier* class, living off their investments without seeking to unduly enlarge their holdings or extract maximum value from them.

Within the MCC, South Yarra and East Melbourne were essentially bourgeois areas and their experience perhaps confirms the tendency for such women and other *rentiers* to invest in flats. Blocks of flats were particularly appropriate investments for these people because they required little in the way of maintenance or upkeep. Most were new or reasonably new, and were therefore unlikely to have major structural problems. Flat blocks also shared one roof, one set of gutters and usually one water system per block. An owner was therefore not potentially liable for a series of problems should anything go wrong with these expensive building components. The owner of a series of individual houses, or even a terrace could, on the other hand, be required to repair each of these problems individually. As a consequence, flats made economic sense for non-professional investors who could maintain their investments without too many financial or logistical worries. The evidence for flats performing such a role is also strengthened by the fact that several blocks were owned by the same people for long periods. In South Yarra, for example, Harold Hawker maintained ownership of a block in Toorak Road from 1925 when my records begin until at

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[48] M. Daunton, *A Property-Owning Democracy?: Housing in Britain*, Faber, London, 1987, p. 34.

least 1945. Lucy Dunlop did the same with her block, Arundel in Commercial Road, while Mary Jackson maintained ownership of a block of four flats in Park Street from 1920 until at least the early 1940s.

Many single women or groups of women owned flats, including in several cases multiple blocks. Alice Fasal, for example was the sole owner of eighteen four- and five-roomed flats in different blocks in Acland and Millswyn Streets, South Yarra. Estelle Herman, another single woman, owned the Royal, – ten flats in Robe Street, St Kilda. Her address in both the rate books and the electoral rolls is listed simply as the Esplanade Hotel. She is also listed as having no occupation, suggesting she was a wealthy gentlewoman living off her investments.[49] Another feature of the flat-market was the tendency for the owner of a block to live in one of the flats, while letting out the others to provide an income. This practice appears to have been more common for women than men, and may be a reflection of the traditional practice of women who were unwilling or unable to work outside the home, letting out neighbouring properties they owned as their main form of income. The largest single owner-occupier in the MCC in 1945, for instance, was Eileen Watkins who lived in a block of thirty flats she owned at 541 St Kilda Road.[50] This female presence is also simply a reflection noted above of the tendency for women to operate investment properties – previously boarding houses, but now more and more flats – as a wider extension of their traditional domestic role.[51]

East Melbourne provides a particularly good example of the phenomenon of female and familial ownership of flats. Of the sixty-three blocks there in 1945, eleven were owned solely by a woman and another six were owned jointly by two or more women, most of whom appear to have been sisters. Another eight blocks

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[49] The only other 'Herman' listed in the electoral roll for the St Kilda area is Hyman Herman, a Director of Redan Street. They are possibly related. See below, re Estelle Herman being in the market for flats in South Yarra and Toorak in the 1930s.

[50] She appears to have inherited the block as s some form of legal settlement, as ownership is ascribed to the 'Eileen Watkins Settlement'.

[51] See Chapter Two.

were owned by women in partnership with men – most it would appear – their husbands or brothers. Joint ownership by siblings suggests that the flats were a shared family investment, perhaps of an inheritance. Marion Purbrick, Hazel Russell and Evelyn and Doris Notcutt, for instance, were sisters who inherited a 'brick-cemented two-story (sic) residence in bad repair' owned by their father in Grey Street, East Melbourne after his death in 1930.[52] The 1945 MCC *Rate Books* show that in the early 1940s they demolished this house and replaced it with Hayling, a block of eighteen flats they retained in joint-ownership (Illustration 28).[53] These flats would have provided a quite reasonable income for the four. Wilfred Prest found in 1945 that the average weekly rental for three and four room flats was between twenty-nine and thirty-seven shillings. On this basis the four sisters would have shared a weekly income of between twenty-six and thirty-three pounds, or six to eight pounds each, per week.[54]

Women also featured strongly as owners in St Kilda. Of the 225 blocks in the West Ward in 1940 for example, about one third were owned by women either singly or with other women. Another eighteen were owned by women in partnership with men – again, it would seem, their husband or brothers. But an aspect of women and flats in St Kilda, but not so noticeable in Melbourne, was the tendency for a woman to be the registered owner of a block, while her husband would be listed as the occupier or head of household. An example of this is Aida Cohen, who in 1940 was listed as the owner of Thirty, a block in Fitzroy Street, yet the occupier of her flat is given as Sidney Cohen, who is her husband. In this case Aida was the owner, having inherited her family house on the site after her mother's death in 1919. Aida inherited the house with her two sisters, one of whom, Maud, was married to Sidney Cohen but died in the 1930s. Aida Solomon and Sidney Cohen later married and continued to live in their flat until Sidney died in late 1945 and Aida a year later. Aida left her estate to her stepson Percy Cohen, a medical practitioner. She also left a three pound per week

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[52] PROV, VPRS 7591/P2 Unit 289, Will No. 236759, Thomas Foster Notcutt.

[53] PROV, VPRS 5708 Unit 121.

[54] W. Prest, 'Rents in Melbourne', *The Economic Record*, Vol. 21, June 1945, p. 46.

benefaction to her younger sister Myra Markson, who had been left one third of the original family house.[55]

Real Estate Agents, Commercial Families and Flats

Many quite well-known individuals and families owned flats across Melbourne. In St Kilda, for instance, the Hume family of Geo Hume and Co, real estate agents were the owners of twenty-two flats at 628 St Kilda Road through their family company, Hume Investments Pty Ltd of 220 Collins Street, Melbourne. In 1945, the family patriarch George Hume lived in the block, which appears to have been a series of adjoining maisonettes.[56] Humes and other estate agencies acted as managers and advisers to flat owners and operators, but unfortunately most of these companies, including Humes have destroyed their records. But the files of Williams and Co of South Yarra provide some insight into the flat market in the 1920s and 1930s. Several of Williams' flat-owning clients were large commercial families, including among others, the Berkowitz family of furniture retailing fame, the Marriott family of the electrical manufacturing company Hecla, the McAlpin flour-milling family, and the Dixon family, owners of soft-drinks manufacturing company, OT Limited.[57] Other clients included the Hair family, owners of Merle's gift importing business, Cecil Rhodes-Smith, a woolbroker of Sydney, the Visbord family, mercers and financiers, and the Ryan family who were the owners of the Woodmason and Melrose dairies in Malvern Road, Malvern.[58]

For a monthly percentage of gross rents, Williams' would take on the management of properties from owners or developers. In the case of flats it would look after letting, maintenance, rent collection and general day-to-day conduct of

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[55] PROV, VPRS 8816 P1 Unit 205; Probate of Aida Lilllias Cohen No. 392492, PROV, VPRS 7591 P2 Unit 1375; Probate of Sidney Cohen No. 385099, PROV, VPRS 7591 P2 Unit 1350. I can only assume that Maud died, but there is no record of this in Victoria.

[56] PROV, VPRS 8816 P1 Unit 225; Each flat was given a separate name in the Rate Books. George Hume's own flat, for instance was called Raleigh.

[57] Williams and Co Collection.

the block. Owners were simply sent a monthly cheque and statement that detailed all incomings and outgoings, including the management fee. The company would also act as the conduit for any problems tenants and owners might have with each other. Owners could choose to remain anonymous if they so wished and absentee owners could also use Williams' as their local contact for tenants and other government and private agencies. The company was often approached by owners to take on this role, but every now and then it would write to the developer of a new block seeking business.

When seeking work from one client, Williams' described their responsibilities as managing agents as including:

> the collection of the rents and the general management of the flats, which includes. (sic) Advertising in the daily papers. Having our representative on the premises every week-end until all flats are let and a going concern. Preparing a pamphlet describing the flats...Letting the flats, preparing the leases and having them signed by all parties. Collecting the rents and supplying you with a monthly rent statement on the first of every month. Attending to the automatic for the general lighting. Paying the gardener and any small accounts due at the flats on your behalf. Attending to all rates and taxes and appealing against all unfair valuations. Attending to all petty requirements of the tenants with whom we would leave our private telephone numbers should we be required after hours and during the week-ends.[59]

The management fee was normally five per cent 'on the actual collections made on behalf of our clients', and was deducted at source. This side of the business was obviously successful. When they sought the management contract for Brookwood in Queens Road, Melbourne in 1936, Williams' wrote to Mr FR Lee, the legal representative of the owners, Brookwood Estates Pty Ltd, and claimed to manage 385 flats in sixty-one blocks across the inner suburbs.[60] Their pitch was obviously a success as they won the right to manage the new block.

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Williams and Co, Box: Bound Correspondence, File :Trawalla.

[60] Ibid, File: Flats 1937.

In early 1932 Williams' tendered for the rights to manage Trawalla Court, a block of flats then under construction in Toorak. The block and adjoining house were owned by Kia Ora Investments Pty Ltd, the investment company of the Dixon family, owners of OT Limited, makers of 'Kia Ora' cordial. The agents wrote to John Dixon as representative of Kia Ora Investments setting out what they believed to the most appropriate finishes for the block, including interior and exterior decoration, lighting, ventilation, and the provision of laundry facilities for tenants. The cost of management was to be a discounted 'three per cent on the amount of money collected from the tenants', presumably because the firm sought further business from the family, or because the Depression had forced them to reduce their normal rates. The tender was accepted by Dixon, on the proviso that he had the final say on the acceptability or otherwise of tenants, and that the 'arrangement [could] be terminated by a month's notice in writing on either side'.

Kia Ora Investments went on to become a large holder of property, especially of flats, in interwar Melbourne. By the end of the 1930s Williams' were managing five properties for the company, including Regent Court in Marne Street, South Yarra, Trawalla in Toorak and the largest, Kia Ora – sixty flats in two parallel blocks in St Kilda Road. There is also evidence that the family had other property interests that were not managed by Williams'.[61] The income provided by the family's investment in flats was significant in a time of general austerity. The potential rent from Trawalla was estimated by Williams' in 1932 to be just over forty pounds per week from the twelve flats and another four pounds from the eight garages and eight maid's rooms included in the complex. These were to be let separately to tenants if they required them.[62]

Similarly, before the first stage of the Kia Ora complex was completed in mid–1936, Williams' wrote to Dixon estimating it would return around £96 per week gross, and £75 after letting and other fees had been deducted.[63] When the second

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[61] Ibid, Box: Bound Periodicals 1936 K–L, File: Kia Ora.

[62] Ibid, File: Trawalla.

[63] Ibid, Box: Bound Correspondence 1936 H–L, File: Kia Ora.

stage of Kia Ora was nearing completion in early 1937, they again wrote detailing the weekly rents of the second thirty flats. These ranged from £2.17.6 for three small flats, to £3.17.6, for the three largest. All up the second stage brought in more than a hundred pounds per week, although it was considered less successful than the first stage, partly because the completion of the flats was held up and letting slower than anticipated.[64] By early 1938, however, Kia Ora was a major success, and it and the family's other flat investments were providing a sizeable income. In January of that year, Kia Ora brought in £380/3/2 gross, and £354/19/8 after commission and caretaking costs had been deducted. The family's total income from their flat investments managed by Williams and Co, in January 1938, was £1,017/12/6 gross and £934/13/4 net.[65]

Another commercial family with extensive investments in flats in St Kilda and elsewhere were the McAlpins – owners of 'McAlpin's Model Bakery' and the 'McAlpin's Self-Raising Flour' company of Abbotsford. Members of the family were first listed in the St Kilda Rate Books as the owners of thirty-two flats in four blocks along the Esplanade near Luna Park in 1935. By the time of the 1940 survey they had sold one of these, but retained the rest until at least the end of the War.[66] The extended McAlpin family were large investors in property in interwar Melbourne, and in the 1930s, in flats. Williams and Co took over the management of their properties in 1936 and produced a statement of their holdings and rental income at that time. Various members of the family owned forty-nine flats in five blocks in St Kilda and Toorak, Queens Mansions boarding house and the Waldorf hotel in St Kilda, as well as twenty-three houses in Prahran, South Yarra, South Melbourne, Middle Park and Albert Park.[67] As with the Dixons, their flat investments provided a good income to different members of the family by the

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[64] Ibid, Box: Bound Correspondence 1937 K–L, File: Kia Ora.

[65] Ibid, Box: Statements 1938, File: January–February 1938

[66] The Electoral Roll for Kooyong in 1945 lists George McAlpin of 15 Hillcrest Ave, Kew, as a 'flour manufacturer'; Mary McAlpin and Alice and Margaret McAlpin are also in my City of Melbourne records for 1945 as owning a block of 9 flats and 9 flats, respectively, in South Yarra in 1945. Given that those records do not show the address of the owners, I can only assume that they are from the same family. These properties were not managed by Williams and Co.

[67] Williams and Co, Box: Bound Correspondence 1936 Mc–P, File: McAlpin.

late 1930s. GH and J McAlpin grossed £256/18/0 from Strath Lodge and Warwick Hall in St Kilda in January 1938. The after-cost return was £225/5/0. Their other investments, including the Esplanade flats and the Waldorf in St Kilda, and Tsoshan in Toorak Road, South Yarra brought in £419/18/10 gross and £381/11/0 net. JH, EA and AM McAlpin netted over sixty pounds from their seven flats at Sur La Mer, and GH McAlpin earned fifty-six pounds net from his Monarra block, also on the St Kilda Esplanade.[68]

A Sydney woolbroker, Cecil Rhodes-Smith used an inheritance from his mother's estate to enter the Melbourne flat market in the mid–1930s. He inherited a pair of houses in Domain Road, South Yarra which had been let out as four flats, but by 1935 these were becoming hard to let and he therefore decided to realise the value of the land by developing it as flats. He wrote to Williams' seeking their help in this venture and they wrote back enclosing the plans of Ahlwyn, a block of six flats recently completed in nearby Park Street.[69] Rhodes-Smith replied stating that he 'desire[d] to erect a building very similar to Ahlwyn and at a similar cost'. He also suggested that Williams' would be the managing agents upon completion.[70] Williams' replied saying that in their opinion 'a block of flats similar to those suggested, would prove a highly successful investment, and we have no hesitation in stating you will have no cause to regret your decision'. Rhodes-Smith engaged the architect Marcus Martin to design the block which, after consultation with Williams' he called Gladswood Gardens (Illustration 29).[71]

The block was built by a local builder, a Mr Pitman, who along with the architect, was under strict instruction and oversight from both Williams' and the owner. Rhodes-Smith was particularly concerned that the building be fully damp-proofed, as the original houses on the site had lost value because of their

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[68] Ibid, Box: Statements 1938, File: January–February 1938.

[69] Rhodes-Smith was co-executor, with Dr Francis Haley, of the estate of Clementia J. Smith; Ibid, Box: 'Files dealing with' File: Rhodes Smith.

[70] Ibid, Box: Bound Correspondence 1935, File: Rhodes-Smith.

[71] Williams would sometimes send clients lists of possible names for blocks as part of their management service.

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dampness. He was prepared to pay extra in order to ensure his flats did not suffer the same fate.[72] The block was completed in the spring of 1935 and was finished to include the latest in internal and external electrical fittings including 'additional lighting points and also two-way switches and an electrical time clock'.[73] In July 1935 Williams' wrote to Rhodes-Smith advising him that the flats were progressing well, and attracting interest from potential tenants. After having previously advised that the flats would let for £2/2/0, the company informed Rhodes-Smith that the flats were easily letting for £2/5/0 per week, plus five shillings each for the garages. The flats were therefore grossing thirteen pounds ten shillings per week, plus any extra raised from letting the garages.

One of the largest holdings of flats in St Kilda in the interwar years was that of the Visbord family. Their ownership of flats became a feature of the local Rate Books from 1935 when Harry Visbord of Bay Street, Brighton was first listed as the owner of thirty-three flats in three blocks – The Orion, The Pacific and The Atlantic – on the site of the former St Kilda court house at the junction of Barkly and Grey Streets. By 1945 Victor Visbord was listed as owning Bellevue at 70 Barkly Street, while ownership of the original thirty-three flats was attributed to WE, M, and C Visbord of Collins Street, Melbourne. Harry Visbord died in July 1939, leaving his estate to his wife and three sons, Maurice, Wolf, and Clive – the WE, M, and C, listed in the Rate Books. His probate was valued at £6812 realty and £41,356/3/- in personal assets.[74] Victor Visbord was a mercer of Verdant Ave, Toorak, although he does not appear to be a close family member, given that he was not mentioned in Harry's will, it can be assumed, given the unusual name, that he was related somehow.[75] By 1950 the family had disposed of all of the blocks in St Kilda, perhaps because like the major institutional investors

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[72] Ibid.

[73] External lighting, operated by timers were becoming standard features of new blocks by the mid–1930s. They allowed residents to safely enter and exit their flats after dark, and just as importantly, allowed owners to ensure the lights were only used when necessary. They were usually switched off at about eleven or twelve o'clock at night, thus saving electricity costs.

[74] PROV, VPRS 7951/P2, Will No. 313 062, HA Visbord.

[75] Commonwealth Electoral Roll 1945, Electorate: Fawkner. Subdivision of Toorak

in flats they found they could obtain better returns from other investment outlets in the postwar period.[76]

The development or acquisition of flats by commercial families raises some interesting questions about flats as investments. As we have seen, Martin Daunton has argued that in nineteenth century England petit-bourgeois business owners invested in rental housing because, as an investment, it was 'secure and local'.[77] It is possible that in interwar Melbourne the residential market may have maintained its status as a passive form of investment for the unattached offspring of the bourgeoisie, along the lines of nineteenth century Britain. This argument may hold true to a certain extent for Melbourne's flat market, as we have seen above, although the presence of active commercial families contradicts Daunton's suggestion that domestic property was seen as an appropriate investment for retirement or for wives and daughters. The flat holdings may have been, of course, a means for the female or retired members of the family to receive a reasonably unencumbered, ongoing income.

A more plausible explanation for the involvement of these groups in this market is that flats were used by family businesses as a safe secure investment outlet for surplus profits as these recovered in the wake of the Depression. Other investment outlets, such as the stockmarket which recovered in the late 1930s, were probably seen as too risky for the investment of family funds. Similarly, even when the option of investing in commercial and industrial stocks and property increased in the late 1930s, it is possible that families involved in manufacturing may have felt it unwise to invest in their opponents' expansion plans.[78] There was also no point in investing in the traditional residential property market as demand for rental accommodation was very poor in most areas, especially those with working- or

[76] See above; Note that the Visbords were also clients of Williams and Co, although few records of their dealings with the agent still exist.

[77] M. Daunton, *A Property-Owning Democracy?*, p. 34.

[78] On the stockmarket and capital raising in the 1930s see D. Merrett, 'Capital Markets and Capital Formation in Australia, 1890–1945', *Australian Economic History Review*, Vol. 37, No. 3, esp. pp. 197–8.

lower-middle-class populations who were the mainstay of the rental market.[79] Even as late as 1940 few investors were investing in rental property other than flats or similar dwellings aimed at the middle-class. The *Argus*' "Financial and Commercial Supplement' published in February of that year, for example, reported that 'the only type of single dwelling now being built for renting' were 'pairs of villas or "villa flats", as they are now called'.[80]

The Williams' files contain several pieces of evidence about the role of flats as investments. Throughout the early 1930s the company would write to its clients and advise them of vacant land for sale that would be suitable for flats. Alternatively it would notify them of completed blocks that it believed would make attractive investments. In November 1932 they approached Lady Moore of Punt Road, South Yarra, advising her of 'several properties we have for sale, which we consider suitable for investments, if converted into flats', and later with news of a house for sale in Toorak on land that was suitable for the building of flats.[81] Other clients, including Estelle Herman of the Esplanade Hotel in St Kilda, were also informed of the prices and returns of flats the company had available.[82] In September 1932, Williams' wrote to Robert Whittaker, suggesting that it had land for sale in Toorak that could be used to erect flats, which the company believed would return '15% gross and 12% nett', while in December of the same year the opera singer John Brownlee of Brighton was advised that Burnham, a

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[79] At the time of the 1933 *Census* about fifty per cent of households in Melbourne rented their dwellings. In older working class suburbs this figure was much higher. There is some evidence that demand for rented accommodation in poorer areas increased during the Depression as former residents who had become outer suburban home buyers in the 1920s had their houses repossessed and were forced to return to the inner suburbs. It is unlikely, however, that this would have greatly increased rents as families tended to double- and triple-up rather than set up separate households. Also, notwithstanding the potential pressures on rents from this source of demand, the overall population of Melbourne dropped during the Depression as many people left the city in search of work elsewhere. On repossessions see L. Frost and T. Dingle, 'Sustaining Suburbia', and R. Murray and K. White, *A Bank for the People*, Chs. 17–18; On people returning to family homes in the inner suburbs and of others leaving the city altogether see among others, J. McCalman, *Struggletown*, Chs. 5–6, and F. Huelin, *Keep Moving: An Odyssey*, Australasian Book Society, Sydney, 1973.

[80] *Argus*, 'Financial and Commercial Supplement', 8 February 1940.

[81] Williams and Co, File: Unlabelled (possibly 'Etheridge').

[82] Ibid; This was the same Estelle Herman noted above, who became the owner of the Royal in Robe Street, St Kilda.

new block in Grange Road, Toorak was available for £7750, which represented a ten per cent return.[83] This was obviously better than the returns then available on investments elsewhere. Similar approaches to potential developers and buyers were made in 1933 and subsequent years.

Advice to invest in flats also came from other sources. In each of its editions the business magazine *Rydge's* would invite readers to comment on suitable investment strategies for other readers. In December 1933, a widow wrote in requesting advice on how she should invest her money. The following February a real estate agent from Newcastle replied suggesting that the 'safest and best investment for a widow would be a modern block of flats'. He suggested that in most Australian cities a block of four flats could be purchased for £2,200, and let at at least 37/6' per week. The block, he suggested, should return something in the order of 'a clear fifteen per cent, even at today's low rentals', or alternatively he felt that she 'could occupy one of the flats, and still have an excellent income'.[84]

Similarly in the yearly 'Financial and Commercial Supplement' produced by the *Argus* throughout the 1930s, the benefits of investing in flats, or even in land in districts where flats were popular, was frequently stressed.[85] This was particularly the case in Toorak and South Yarra where large estates were being broken up as families found that without servants – who were becoming increasingly difficult to find in the interwar years – these places were almost impossible to run. When smaller houses became more common and socially acceptable as domestic labour-

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[83] Ibid, File: Unlabelled, and CG Borrett, 'Burnham'.

[84] *Rydge's*, December 1933, February 1934.

[85] There is very little evidence available about the financing of these purchases. Most of the contemporary discussions about flats as investments seems to assume that investors have their own sources of finance, which given my findings that many of the owners were investing inheritances and excess profits is probably a reasonable assumption. Nor do the Williams and Co letters to potential buyers mention sources of finance, but again given that these people appear to be reasonably well-off, we can assume that they either self-financed or used sources such as solicitor's funds. As late as the mid–1960s, before strata title legislation allowed mass private ownership of flats, a Housing Industry Association investigation found the majority of construction and purchaser finance for flats was private and that the 'major source of [this] private finance is through solicitors'. There is also some evidence that in the 1930s, and in the 1960s, builders and would use the profits on one block to on-finance their next project. See Housing Industry Research Committee, *Flats*, p. 12; Also see discussion of Alan Hone below.

saving devices became more available, owners also became aware that the huge amounts of well-located and well-serviced land their houses sat on was becoming increasingly valuable.[86] As the 1930s wore on many realised their hidden value and sold-off lots to developers either for smaller houses, or increasingly, flats. In 1936 the *Argus* reported that '[o]wners are finding that land in picked position is too valuable to carry only a single dwelling' and in consequence they were demolishing old houses and building flats in their place.[87]

In 1937 the 'Financial Supplement' reported that investors were requiring 'a ten per cent gross return on maisonettes and blocks up to four flats'. Larger blocks, however, required returns of 'up to twelve per cent' in order 'to cover the average percentage of vacancies and caretaker and service charges'. Again, these were levels of return higher than then available on other investments, including Commonwealth Securities which were paying only four per cent interest.[88] From the early 1930s then, flats were one of the few suitable investment outlets available for those whose businesses remained viable, or whose personal wealth stayed intact during the downturn. Aimed as they were at the middle-class and located in traditionally affluent areas, flats were also a safe investment. Hamnett and Randolph argue that a similar phenomenon occurred at the same time in England where, they suggest, the major increase in the number of flats in London in the 1930s was a direct outcome of the Depression. By the mid–1930s, they argue, 'the returns on industrial shares and the rate of interest were low and building costs had fallen substantially', and that investors therefore turned their

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[86] There is no systematic survey of the increased value of inner suburban land in Melbourne during this period, but Ron Silberberg's study of the 1880s suggests that proximity to the city and levels of urban services such as public transport greatly increased the value of such land. See R. Silberberg, The Melbourne Land Market in the 1880s', Unpublished PhD Thesis, Monash University, 1977, esp. Ch. 3, 'Spatial structure of the Urban Land Market'; Also see his 'The Melbourne Land Boom', *Australian Economic History Review*, Vol. 17, September 1977, pp. 117-130.

[87] *Argus*, 'Financial and Commercial Supplement', 17 January 1936.

[88] Ibid, 12 January 1937; The same paper's report for business and investment in 1940 suggested that as a result of the early wartime economic restrictions, 'investors were moving strongly into property' because it was providing higher returns than 'fixed deposits and other forms of investment', Ibid, 13 February 1941.

efforts to exploiting the growing demand for flat accommodation.[89] In support of their argument they quote Marian Bowley who suggested in 1945 that economic conditions in the mid–1930s made residential investment 'favourable for the first time since the Great War'.[90]

Like some of their colleagues in London, Melbourne's builders, developers and entrepreneurial architects joined with investors to take advantage of the collapse in property values and building costs associated with the Depression to move into the flat market in the 1930s. Howard Lawson, the South Yarra 'architect who builds' continued his building activities, culminating in the large two-block Beverley Hills development high above Alexandra Avenue, finished in 1935 (Illustration 30). Beverley Hills, as its name suggests, evoked images of the glamour of Hollywood and featured a tiled-terrace, complete with swimming pool.[91] Other architects appear to have teamed up with investors to specialise in building flats. One of these architects was Marcus Martin, who designed both Ahlwyn and Gladswood Gardens in South Yarra. Joseph Plottel, an architect of Queen Street, appears to have been the developer of Redholm flats in Toorak, while Robert Hamilton also of Queen Street became something of a specialist in flats in the 1930s.[92] In 1932 he designed Haddon Hall in Toorak for a Dr M. Schalit of St Kilda, and in the same year acted in an agency role, investigating potential development sites in Toorak and South Yarra for a Dr Stone, who appears to have been interested in developing flats.[93] On his return to Melbourne from England in the early 1930s, Best Overend also specialised in flat developments, most notably with 'minimum' or 'bachelor' one-room flats, the best example of which is his Cairo block in Nicholson Street, Fitzroy.[94]

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[89] C. Hamnett and B. Randolph, 'The Rise and Fall', p. 163

[90] M. Bowley, *Housing and the State, 1919–1944*, London, 1945, p. 81–2, quoted in C. Hamnett and B. Randolph, Ibid, p. 163.

[91] Nigel Lewis and Associates, *Prahran Conservation Study*, 'Alexandra Avenue Area'; R. McKenzie, 'Style in Australian Architecture'.

[92] Williams and Co, passim.

[93] Ibid, File: Unlabelled.

[94] For a discussion of Overend's work see, P. Goad, 'Best Overend'.

Allen Hone was a home builder who moved into the development of flats in the 1930s. He specialised in flats in South Yarra, Toorak and St Kilda, and was responsible for several of the prewar blocks along Alexandra Avenue near the Botanical Gardens. His niece, Joan Manton suggests that his first flat venture was Astolat in Carlisle Street, East St Kilda, which he completed in about 1934, before on-selling it to Dr Kidd of Elsternwick in May 1935.[95] According to Manton he then bought a house on a large block of land at the corner of Walsh Street and Alexandra Avenue which he demolished to build Heyington, a block of nine three-room flats. He in turn sold these in the late 1930s to build Springfield, a block of six five-room flats on the corner, overlooking the river. He kept these flats and they are now owned by his niece and great niece. Just before the Second World War he built Malonga, a group of maisonettes in East Kilda, which he sold after the war.[96]

Hone's was a fairly small operation, not much larger than the small speculative companies that blossomed in the postwar period. His architects were either Leslie Reid or alternatively Arthur Plaisted, who was an old school friend. Williams and Co managed his blocks, carrying out their usual services such as finding tenants and collecting rents, and they also acted as the selling agents for those blocks built speculatively. Allen Hone died a reasonably rich man in 1956, leaving his estate to his sister and niece. His experience suggests that those builders and developers who survived the worst of the Depression were able to make good money in the 1930s by buying unwanted large houses on good sites before developing them as flats, which were heavily in demand at that time.[97] Reports in the 'Financial and Commercial Supplement' of the *Argus* throughout the 1930s suggest that this was

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[95] Joan Manton; Interview; Williams and Co, Box: Bound Correspondence 1935 JKLM, File: Kidd.

[96] Joan Manton, Interview.

[97] Ibid.

a reasonably common practice as 'old residential properties were sold and subsequently demolished to make way for big building schemes'.[98]

Conclusion

The development or acquisition of flats in the interwar years was, then, simply a subset of the wider property market. Flats were popular with an important component of the rental-market because of their convenience and appointments, and investors simply reacted to a good opportunity. Owning flats and using them as a source of income was not very much different from ordinary residential investment. If a composite profile of a flat-owner in inner Melbourne in the interwar years was to be created, then we could suggest that it would be a middle-class professional male who lived in the eastern or southern suburbs and held only a small portfolio of properties. But the composite would disguise as much as it would enlighten. A significant number of flat owners were women, especially single women, and many were investing the proceeds of inheritances or independent incomes in the traditional destination of this type of money – the local residential property market. Another sizeable group of owners were businesses and business families whose decision to invest in this market appears to have had as much to do with the limited other options available, as with a long-term commitment to flats or residential property in general.

Ownership of flats did not reflect badly on an individual's character, nor did it necessarily mean that an individual was of questionable or dubious character. It is more likely that by the mid–1930s, ownership and/or management of new purpose-built flats in a fashionable inner suburb became a far more acceptable occupation for women than was the ownership or management of a boarding house. Flats were also a convenient investment for women because they tended to be new or nearly new and thus unlikely to become the financial burden that older housing potentially was. Flats allowed women and other non-professional

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[98] See *Argus*, 'Financial and Commercial Supplement', 12 January 1937, for a discussion of St Kilda Road's changing face in this period. Some of these were former boarding houses as

investors to own modern properties that had all expected conveniences, again without the expense of renovating or upgrading an older dwelling. Residence in her own block of flats in a respectable suburb also allowed a female owner to keep an eye on her investment while maintaining an address in a middle-class suburb, perhaps the suburb in which she had been born and bred. For business and commercial families flats provided similar conveniences, and perhaps also allowed a family to receive a good income without having to go through the inconvenience and difficulties of buying many different properties across the city.

The decline in property and other prices in the wake of the Depression forced some people and groups to consider investing in flats, but it also allowed others to gain a foothold in a new and expanding section of the residential market. Architects, builders and small-scale developers were able to enter the flat market and, it appears in at least some cases, to dramatically expand their businesses and gain some financial advancement. But for most entrants into the flat market, be they businesses, private investors, women or families, flats were simply a good investment. In most cases their investment decision probably simply reflected an opportunity that came up when other options were unavailable or unacceptable. I doubt whether too many flat buyers thought particularly deeply about the morality or rectitude of flat living as a way of life, or whether their decision to enter this market caused others to think less of them. Similarly, few would have been too concerned about whether their decisions were changing the character of Melbourne – except perhaps if too many flats began to appear in their own neighbourhood or street.

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discussed in Chapter Six.

Conclusion

The interwar flat-building boom was brought to a sudden halt by the introduction of strict controls on private building in the wake of Pearl Harbour. Few private flats were built in Melbourne until the late 1950s, after which a fifteen-year program of public and private sector development saw the number of flats in the city more than double. In the 1990s a new wave of development is underway in many of the same inner city suburbs that were witness to the first and second booms. As in the 1930s, the promoters of flats argued in the 1960s that they heralded the coming to Melbourne of a new way of life that was more cosmopolitan and sophisticated than the suburban norm. Today's advocates use similar arguments and suggest that Melburnians have abandoned outer suburban areas in favour of the inner and bayside suburbs that allegedly offer a more attractive 'lifestyle'. In the 1960s and again today many critics of higher-density housing have questioned these assumptions and defended their suburban homes and backyards with vigour. They also decry the coming of what they see as 'dog-boxes' to their streets and neighbourhoods, suggesting, much like their grandparents' generation in the 1930s, that these dwellings are not really 'homes', but temporary accommodation for people with lifestyles outside society's norms.

The cyclical nature of the multi-unit market lends weight to my argument that the large number of flats built in the 1930s was largely a response to several short-term social and economic factors. Then, a combination of high levels of demand caused by the relatively large numbers of new households formed in response to demographic and social change, and supply factors such as the lack of many other suitable investment outlets in the wake of the stockmarket crash and the Depression, made flats attractive to both investors and tenants. In contrast, the 1960s boom was largely demand-led, representing a response from developers to the housing needs of the baby-boom generation as they reached adulthood and set up house for themselves.[1] Flats were built in huge numbers in that decade at the same time as the stockmarket surged and industrial, commercial and traditional

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[1] HIRC, *Flats*, pp. 7–8.

residential markets flourished.

The 1990s boom, on the other hand, appears to more closely resemble that of the 1930s. Supply and demand have again coincided to produce many new households as the baby-boomers age and seek smaller, or more easily-maintained dwellings, while property is again seen by many investors as a hedge against the vicissitudes of the stockmarket. Again, as in the 1930s, demand today comes in part from an increase in the number of single-female households. As new economic and social opportunities open for women, some have decided to delay or reject relationships and child-rearing responsibilities. For many, an inner city flat or 'apartment' – now the socially-acceptable term for these dwellings – is the most appropriate and secure solution to their housing needs. Perhaps the greatest contrast between the 1930s and today is that a large proportion of today's 'apartments' are owner-occupied by these women and other people whose needs are not met by the single-family detached house.

Formal boarding is virtually non-existent today. The term 'boarding house' is still used, but mainly as a generic term for rooming or lodging houses. In the postwar period the number of these places ballooned and, in the tradition of the Chicago School, acted as temporary accommodation for local and international migrants arriving in Melbourne. But, as in the late interwar years, most places simply provided accommodation to residents. Meals were rarely, if ever, provided. Today, former boarding houses have been demolished to make way for multi-unit developments, or have returned to their original function as single-family houses in gentrifying inner suburbs. Others have become special accommodation houses for the physically or intellectually disabled. Low-cost inner-city accommodation for people who cannot afford to rent or buy a flat or house has become increasingly scarce. Government and philanthropic organisations have bought up and renovated some rooming houses and let these out at below-market rates, but the extent of this provision is very limited. The reliance on market forces to deal with housing problems in the 1990s is exacerbating this problem, because, as ever,

the poor come last in a free housing market.[2]

Board is still provided informally, although it is now a very minor component of the housing market. Women and families still provide board in private houses to young people arriving in the city for work or study, although this is now relatively uncommon. Today's newspapers have very few of these advertisements compared with the early years of this century. A specialist market does exist, however, in the provision of board to young men and women who move to the city to play football or other sports. Coaches and senior players take these young people into their houses, with wives/partners providing board and lodging, as well as acting as surrogate mothers if the need arises.[3]

Of the hostels for business girls discussed in Chapter Five, only the Girls' Friendly Society Lodge still operates. Renamed Edith Head Hall after the wife of a former Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, the hostel has been located in North Melbourne since 1973. Few of its current inhabitants are young women working in the city. Most are students, the majority young women from Asia. Much in the same manner as country Australian parents seventy-or-so years ago, their parents see the hostel as a safe haven for their daughters.[4] St Anne's hostel closed in 1970. The majority of its residents in the ten or so years before that were student nurses at the nearby hospitals, rather than 'business girls' working in offices or shops.[5] Chalmers Hall closed a few years later and was demolished in 1975.[6] The Princess Mary Club building still exists in Lonsdale Street in the city, although it remains empty after being condemned as a fire-trap in 1989. In its final years it also mostly provided accommodation to young Asian men and women completing their studies in Melbourne.[7] The Salvation Army's Spring House closed in the mid-1970s and the site was redeveloped as offices a decade later.[8] The YWCA moved

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[2] L. Luxford, 'Boarding and Lodging-House Accommodation Project', esp. pp. 88–98.

[3] On the provision of board for young players see former Brisbane Lions coach Robert Walls in the *Age*, 1 November 1997.

[4] *Jeanne Stanford*, Interview, North Melbourne, 4 December 1997.

[5] E. O'Loughlin, *Among the Terraces*, p. 7.

[6] National Trust File No. 826, Chalmers Hall.

[7] R. Howe and S. Swain, *The Challenge of the City*, pp. 184–5.

[8] Salvation Army Heritage and Archives Centre, Melbourne, File: 'Spring House, Spring Street,

from Russell Street in 1975 and its hostel, now renamed the 'Hotel Y', is a relatively cheap hotel for anyone who cares to use it and can afford its room rates. The Association does, however, provide shelter to young women, again mostly students, at its Richmond House centre in Church Street, Richmond.[9]

All the hostels fell victim to changing community standards, and to the desire among tenants for privacy and better amenity. From the late 1960s, young women demanded greater social and sexual freedoms, and would no longer tolerate the restrictions supervised hostel-living placed on them. As Renate Howe and Shurlee Swain point out in the case of the Princess Mary Club, the 'difference between the restrictions of the hostel and the freedom available to young women outside was increasing', meaning that the numbers of residents declined rapidly.[10] Nor were young women prepared to accept the rather basic amenities and drab food provided in these places. Many took advantage of the rapidly increasing numbers of flats available to set up house by themselves or with friends. As with boarding houses fifty years earlier, the only women who remained in hostels after the 1970s tended to be those who found themselves trapped by economic or social circumstances in accommodation that was no longer really suited to their needs. The other remaining group were young women from other countries and cultures that insisted on the supervision of single women.

The debate over what constitutes a 'home' still rages in Australia. As parts of Melbourne are rebuilt at higher densities, defenders of the detached house do battle with developers and housing commentators about the relative merits of their favourite dwelling form. The advocates of higher densities (or 'urban consolidation' as it is usually referred to in Australia) re-use many of the arguments put forward in favour of flats in the 1930s. People are again allegedly tired of long commutes to work, and are no longer interested in maintaining large houses and gardens unsuited to their needs. They are also said to be keen on taking advantage of the nightlife and 'lifestyle' opportunities offered by the inner

Melbourne'.
[9] L. Durrant, *YWCA 1882–1982*, pp. 73–5.
[10] R. Howe and S. Swain, *The Challenge of the City*, pp. 184–5.

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city. An increasing number of Melburnians are said to be developing a more urban lifestyle of cafe-life and street-oriented socialising. The consolidationists also argue that higher density housing is environmentally friendly, less taxing of natural resources and less extravagant with non-renewable energy sources. An incongruous Right-Left alliance has therefore developed between property developers seeking profits, fiscally-conservative governments who refuse to pay for costly infrastructure works in outlying areas, and parts of the environment movement who see higher density housing as a means of increasing public transport use, thus reducing our over-reliance on the car.

The defenders of suburbia are also an incongruous mix of Left and Right. Many on the Left deplore the destruction of historic streetscapes and built heritage, and their replacement with medium- and high-rise apartments. Some also argue that the detached house represents a democratic achievement that has improved the lot of the poor and working-class in Australia. They believe that this should not be sacrificed without a wide-ranging debate about social values, including equity issues.[11] More conservative opponents of higher densities appear to be simply defending the dollar values of their property and, like their 1930s equivalents, attempting to keep at bay people with social and ethnic backgrounds different to their own. Some argue that these new dwellings do not fit the model of 'home' as it is understood in Australia, and that these higher density dwellings can never truly be homes. Recently, when asked about the lifestyles of his neighbours who live in medium density units, a long-time resident of suburban Glen Waverley commented, 'I wonder what their life is like? My life is full, their life is not very happy I bet'.[12]

Where these latter critics find themselves in a markedly different position to their predecessors is that their natural political leaders no longer defend their social

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[11] Kevin O'Connor, 'In Defence of Suburbia', *Polis*, No. 1, February 1994, pp. 18–20; P. Troy, *The Perils of Urban Consolidation*, esp. Ch. 5, 'Democracy, Participation and Citizenship'; Also see Hugh Stretton's, 'New Essay: Government and the Cities 1975–2000', in the third edition of his *Ideas for Australian Cities*, esp. pp. XLI–XLVI, 'What urban consolidation can and can't do'.
[12] Gordon Clark, Interview, Glen Waverley, 25 January 1995. Thanks to Tony Dingle for this source.

values. Robert Menzies' successors on the conservative side of politics now side with the consolidationists against their own constituents. Whereas Menzies defended the detached owner-occupied home as a mark of respectability and achievement, a senior member of his own Victorian branch of the Liberal Party now openly derides suburbia and home-centred lifestyles. In a recent interview the State Planning Minister, Robert Maclellan referred to the critics of urban consolidation as the 'wheelie-bin set', trapped in a 'three-bedroom brick veneer, curb-channelled footpath, mower, three sensible children, one sensible dog' lifestyle. These people are, he suggests, out of touch with the 'seachange' that is leading to the mass-adoption of apartment living in Melbourne.[13] He also argues that the market for medium density housing is demand-driven, and that those who oppose it are selfish and 'ill-informed' about the social and demographic changes occurring in the city.[14]

It is far more likely that Melbourne is witnessing a re-run of the 1930s and 1960s flat booms, and that, like its predecessors, this one will eventually run its course. The detached house will more than likely regain its popularity, especially among nuclear families with children. There is, however, a need for a variety of housing types in our cities. As in the interwar years, demographic and social changes are occurring, and for many people the detached house is no longer appropriate. As a society we may need to investigate new forms of dwelling types, including accommodation for single people who wish to live independent, but not isolated, lives. These may take the form of modified boarding houses or hostels with private bathrooms, but with provision for sharing meals and amenities. Hostels and retirement villages for the elderly provide some of these services now, but residents are forced to sacrifice some of their privacy and independence to access them.[15] Similarly, serviced student apartments are being built in large numbers, but again privacy can be an issue in these places. A real debate about our cities

[13] *Age*, 28 December 1998.
[14] *Age*, 14 January 1999.
[15] For a discussion of the housing needs of older people see B. Davison et al, *It's My Place: Older people talk about their* homes, AGPS, Canberra, 1993, esp. Ch. 11, 'Moving On'; Australian Urban and Regional Development Review, *New Homes for Old: Strategy Paper No. 1*, AGPS, Melbourne, 1994, esp. Ch. 1, 'Housing needs and the ageing of the population'.

needs to take place. Defenders of traditional housing need to recognise that some changes need to be made. Proponents of higher densities need to recognise that market forces will not solve these problems alone. A mixture of public and private development is needed, as well as a recognition that different types of dwellings can exist side-by-side.

Most of the people who seek this type of accommodation are, like their predecessors studied in this thesis, relatively ordinary members of society. The affluent seek more luxurious accommodation, perhaps with services and servants supplied, while other people seek comfort, convenience, and security at a price they can afford. As in the period studied in this thesis, for all of these groups apartments, flats, hostels and other types of multi-unit accommodation represent 'home'. Just as the definition of what constituted a home changed in the interwar years to include hostels and flats, so too must we today broaden our definition of home to cover all types of accommodation options, provided they are well-maintained, secure, and affordable. We must also broaden our definition of who constitutes the 'backbone of the country' to include all Australians, no matter what type of dwelling they inhabit, or whether they own it, rent it, or are paying it off to the bank.

This thesis has looked at aspects of Melbourne's urban history that have been ignored or underplayed in the past. Its concentration, however, has mainly been on the middle -and-upper-sectors of the housing market. Further research is needed to investigate the attitudes and aspirations of those whose dwelling options were more limited by income and class than these folk. An investigation into working-class housing in this period would probably suggest that a room or rooms in a tenement or apartment house was not considered to be desirable or fashionable. It is unlikely that the denizens of these dwellings in Richmond or Collingwood saw themselves as having genuine choice, or leading fashionable, 'modern' lives, in the way that their fellow citizens across the river in South Yarra and Toorak did.

Nor did the thousands of people whose housing options were limited by the

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restrictions of wartime and postwar austerity find higher-density housing particularly attractive. These people, some of whom subsisted in rooms and shared housing for years on end, elected Robert Menzies to power in 1949, partly because he promised to do something about the national housing shortage. By increasing ordinary people's access to the 'suburban dream' Menzies was able to remain in power for over sixteen years. A study of these people's attitude to flats and other multi-unit developments in the 1960s and beyond, will locate this study in its wider historical framework, and perhaps act as a further pointer to the cyclical nature of the mult-unit market in Melbourne and elsewhere.

Appendix

A note on method and sources

When I decided to investigate Melbourne's non-family dwellings, I recognised that there was an interesting and important aspect of the city's story that had never been properly told. I set out to write a lively, narrative account of that story. This is a History thesis, and although it is informed by Social Science models, it is fundamentally based on the ideas and narrative traditions of the Humanities. My intention has been to write an accessible account of the people who lived in, and owned or operated Melbourne's early Twentieth Century boarding houses, hostels and flats. The key term in the sub-title of the thesis is 'life', and my thesis seeks to portray, as much as is possible sixty-and-more years later, the lives of the people who lived in or owned these 'places apart'. It is not a systematic or definitive study of all aspects of Melbourne's boarding houses, hostels and flats. Rather, my aim is to attempt to create a 'snapshot' of the lives of the owners, operators, and residents of these places during a period of social and economic flux. Like citizens of other cities around the world, Melburnians found themselves during this period having to come to terms with a growing number of people, especially women, who could not attain, or did not seek a 'home' in the sense in which it had traditionally been understood in the Anglo-Saxon world. These are social as much as policy issues, and my aim is to show how changes in dwelling options were utilised by the increasing numbers of people living close together but apart from the societal norm.

The figures used throughout the thesis are meant to act as guidelines, firstly to the decline of formal boarding in designated boarding houses, and secondly to the major growth and maturation of the purpose-built, self-contained flat sector. These figures are largely drawn from census material and rate book analysis. Neither series provides a strictly accurate tally of the extent of these markets, as I point out throughout the text. Census figures for boarding houses overstate the extent of the market by conflating them with lodging houses and other, almost institutional, dwelling places. In the tradition of Graeme Davison in Melbourne and Max Kelly in

Sydney, I therefore decided that it was necessary to draw on literary and (auto)biographical sources, as well as other non-statistical evidence to attempt to 'flesh out' the story of this part of the Melbourne housing market.

Street directories such as Sands and McDougall's also provide a significant, although again potentially statistically-misleading account of the numbers of these places. They do, however, hint at the prevalence of female proprietors in this sector. This information combined with census records to give a better picture of changes in employment patterns over the period. These two sources, when used together, as in Chapter Two, allow the historian to draw conclusions about changing patterns of provision of board and lodging, and to suggest that formal boarding houses were gradually being superseded by individual women providing board in their own homes, or that services (including meals) were no longer provided in the larger establishments which were reinventing themselves as lodging or apartment houses. Neither source confirms this by themselves, but when combined they create a compelling case.

By using magazines and popular journals it is possible to locate the addresses of some of Melbourne's better-known and reputable boarding houses, and to chart their experiences over the period. The addresses of these boarding houses are matched against those declared by people registering to vote in Victorian and Commonwealth elections, in order to attempt to understand something of the social profile of these places. This is a laborious task as names on the electoral rolls are arranged alphabetically by electorate, rather than by street or neighbourhood. As stated in Chapter Three, they also only contain the names and occupations of residents who have bothered to register, and who were therefore likely to have been reasonably long-term residents. The discussion of these people's occupations is not intended to show definitively the occupational profile of all of Melbourne's boarding house residents. Rather, it is designed to demonstrate that the story of middle- and-upper-class boarding houses has been 'lost' or obliterated from our history, partly by well-meaning, but misguided heritage advocates, determined to preserve Nineteenth Century mansions as single-family dwellings. My aim is to 'recover' this aspect of

our urban history, and to demonstrate that a small but socially significant group of the well-to-do have always resisted the concept of life in the detached single-family home.

Census tabulations of the number of purpose-built flats in Melbourne are useful sources but like those for boarding houses are limited and somewhat flawed in what they describe. This is mainly due to definitional problems about what is or is not a 'flat'. This discrepancy was not sorted out until the 1947 *Census*, and so the figures reproduced in the thesis before that time, like those for boarding houses noted above, conflate two similar but distinct dwelling-types – the flat and the tenement. This is openly acknowledged in the thesis. What these figures can do, however, is alert us to the large number of flats built in the 1930s. The 1947 figures also confirm anecdotal evidence gleaned from newspapers, magazines, and popular discourse about the concentration of flat-building in the inner and eastern and southern suburbs.

Sands and McDougall's *Directory of Victoria*, is another useful source of information about the major locations of Melbourne's flats. But like most other sources it is not definitive, and includes only those flats declared as rental properties in the business section each year. By recording the names of a large sample of blocks across a range of districts, the *Directory's* listings do, however, provide an insight into changes in the way flats were portrayed in real estate and marketing terms over the years. This information is not available in the census, and only sporadically in municipal rate books, where names of blocks were not systematically recorded, especially in early years of this study.

Municipal rate books provide a useful guide to numbers and locations, but again there are flaws in these statistics, which are in part based on the decisions/observations of rate collectors in the field. My survey of these books at five-yearly intervals confirmed the spectacular increase in the numbers of flats in Melbourne, especially in St Kilda, East Melbourne and parts of South Yarra, found in censuses and directories. They are thus an extremely useful guide to numbers and locations, as well as the names of owners and occupiers of flats. Where these figures

can be misleading, however, is in their calculation of the numbers of occupants per flat. In countless instances I found that when a new tenant moved into a flat and the council was informed of his or her name (and in St Kilda, occupation), no effort was made to alter the number of tenants listed in the rate book. Instead the name and details of the new tenant would be simply pencilled in alongside the previous information. But even when tenants stayed put, it is impossible to tell from the rate books whether those residents not named are family members, friends, or even servants, of the head tenant. With all of these problems in mind, I decided that it would better to simply report an indicative range of head-tenant profiles, rather than produce a possibly flawed statistical account of *all* flat-dwellers.

My aim is not to produce a definitive study of the numbers of flats in Melbourne, nor of the number of people who resided in them. Rather it is to use a variety of sources to round-out the received image of flat owners and tenants as somehow 'deviant' or 'un-Australian'. As I point out throughout the thesis, when dealing with issues of belief-systems or ideology, perceptions are often as important as reality. A statistically-rigorous analysis of the occupations and social profiles of flat-dwellers may well prove that they were no more or less 'deviant' than the average Melburnian, but I doubt whether such an analysis would have much effect on public opinion then or now. Those who favour or favoured flats would have their views about their desirability confirmed, and those who didn't would not take much notice anyway. The arguments presented in this thesis are not about who is right or wrong. Rather, they portray debates about different ways of living in a modernising city. These are issues of belief more than fact, which is why the first chapter discussing received ideas of 'home' in Australia and elsewhere is so important to the subsequent story of the existence of a variety of non-mainstream housing options available to those who sought them.

Details on ownership of flats is available form a wide variety of sources including rate books and commercial correspondence. In both the Cities of Melbourne and St Kilda, rate books record the names of owners, and additionally in St Kilda their addresses. As with tenants of boarding houses it is possible to match these with

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electoral rolls and other sources such as *Who's* Who and similar biographical collections in order to gather information about the occupations and social status of these people. Where ownership of flats appears to be related to inheritance probate records can be quite readily checked. As with most aspects of this research, however, there are some flaws in each of these methods. Women, especially middle class ones are routinely described in the rate books as having no occupation outside the home, and are therefore deemed to be economically inactive. I see this as preposterous, and so felt it necessary to combine records from several of these sources in order to gain a better understanding of these women than could be gleaned from any one source. Similarly, discussions of the economic status of male owners needed to be compared and contrasted with information about their social status in order to better understand who these people were and speculate on why it was that they had risked possible social ostracism to invest in a 'deviant' housing form.

The records of South Yarra real estate agency Williams and Company broaden the discussion of flat ownership and provide a much fuller insight than do, say, municipal building applications. The latter are available, but only for the City of Melbourne. The City of St Kilda's have been lost during the local council amalgamations of recent years. I feel, however, that the Williams and Co records are a much better and livelier record of flat development than are building applications which, although they tell us about the intentions of developers and provide plans, are a rather dry one-off account of an on-going process. The Williams and Co records, on the other hand allow the historian to chart the process of an individual or organisation's decision to invest in flats, through to the process of development, and on to commercial considerations about managing the flats, including decisions about such things as standards of fittings and finishes, rent levels, maintenance, and day-to-day management of blocks. These records also detail the rental incomes earned by owners and the profits made by those who decided to on-sell flats to other investors. Details of marketing campaigns conducted by Williams and Co also provide an insight into the process of creating interest in flats in a new and rapidly-expanding market. These records therefore allow the researcher to undertake an on-going

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interrogation of the flat market, rather than simply gain a rather static profile of how many flats were built where and by who.

The inclusion of oral and written testimony represents an attempt to personalise and humanise this story. Although I have some concerns about the accuracy of some the memories recovered in interviews and memoirs – as discussed in Chapter Three – I think they are another important means of 'fleshing out' stories such as this, and help to enliven and personalise larger historical events. Similarly, the thesis is deliberately written in a style that these people or their children and grandchildren will find accessible. I have long felt that it is important that historians – and others – who draw on personal and family memory recognise that they owe it to their interview subjects to write in way that is comprehensible to the general public, and that conveys and pays tribute to the depth of feeling that is often displayed in such interviews.

The range of sources I draw upon is partly in response to the lack of traditional sources of knowledge about the places studied in this thesis. But I also deliberately chose sources that conveyed the contemporary popular awareness of the social changes that were occurring in Melbourne during this period. Much of this knowledge appears to have been lost from our historical memory, particularly in the current debates about urban consolidation and 'lifestyle' issues. One of the purposes of my work is to 'recover' that memory, and to expose the recurring nature of these arguments, which always seem to be conducted in teleological terms, as evidence of Melbourne finally achieving a level of urban sophistication, long experienced in Europe and elsewhere. I aim to demonstrate that many of the same popular newspapers and journals that are today extolling the virtues of higher-density dwellings, were doing the same sixty-years ago in language that is extraordinarily similar in so many ways.

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