

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT INVENTORY

PLACE REFERENCE NO.: BN07 **NEW LISTING**

**NAME:** POINT WALTER fmr. ARMY CAMP SITE  
– whole site incorporating the Watch House

**OTHER NAMES:** --

**PIN NO. (Landgate):** 1085354

**LAND DESCRIPTION:** Crown Reserve 4813  
(no other information)

**LOCATION:** 1 Stock Road, Bicton

**CONSTRUCTION DATE:** 1941 as Army Camp Site  
1947-71 Migrant Reception Centre

**PLACE TYPE:** Recreation and Conference Centre

**USE:** Original Use: Aboriginal campsite; then Melville Army Camp for Training and Rehabilitation; Detention Centre; Migrant Reception Centre; Recreation and Conference Centre  
Current Use: Recreation and Conference Centre

**HERITAGE LISTINGS:**

- Australian Heritage Council Register of the National Estate Place ID 100634 'Point Walter Migrant Reception Centre' 'Indicative Place';
- Department of Aboriginal Affairs Register of Aboriginal Sites Site ID 3536 'Swan River'.

**ARCHITECT:** Department of Defence and Commonwealth Government

**BUILDER:** Department of Defence and Commonwealth Government

**ARCHITECTURAL STYLE:** Natural landscape and introduced 20th century recreational buildings in an adjusted site adapted for army then recreational use.

**CONDITION:** Sound.

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:**

Natural representative bushland. The natural landscape abutting has been adjusted to create clear open spaces now occupied by introduced recreational new buildings. The Watch House is a small-framed building at the eastern entrance to the site, a remnant of the original Department of Defence Army Camp.

**HISTORICAL NOTES:**

Point Walter was part of an Aboriginal campsite and hunting ground. In the summer months the large variety of plants and animals in the area provided the Aborigines with an abundance of food and other resources.

**Military Camp – Point Walter**

The natural landscape of the place was transformed when the Commonwealth Government Department of Defence established the Melville Army Camp on the Point Walter Melville site in 1941, clearing the understorey, creating open space for buildings and camp uses and introducing facilities for army training, to train soldiers in water-borne warfare. The Watch House at the entry to the site is a remnant of the earlier army camp use.

**Detention Barracks – Point Walter**

The No. 11 Detention Barracks for POWs operated at Fremantle Prison from 1939 to June 1946, then transferred in June 1946 until 1947 to Melville Military Camp. The Detention Barracks accommodated 50 POWs in 25 cells – German, Italian and Japanese, plus Internees – Australian, British, Dutch, USA and other allied personnel. The function of the Detention Barracks was to imprison and hold any personnel found guilty or awaiting trial of serious military or civil crimes committed whilst a serving member of any allied force, or an Internee or a POW. POWs were enemy soldiers while Internees were civilians who were deemed to be potentially dangerous to National security.

At various times 13 Italian POWs were committed to lengthy terms of imprisonment at the Detention Barracks. Also all Japanese POWs landed at Fremantle were held at the Barracks until transport to the eastern States could be arranged. The agreement for the Commonwealth of Australia to utilise a State Government prison for Federal purposes was agreed by both Governments in 1922 should the need arise in the future. By January 1943 a total of 16,830 POWs and Internees were detained in Australia. These groups were kept in separate military-run camps. Towards the end of World War II, when it was obvious that Australia was no longer a target for invasion and shortage of manpower was a major concern, most Internees were released. From 1944 no new internments took place, only restriction and surveillance orders remained. Following World War II, the place was put into use as an army rehabilitation camp for convalescing soldiers, prior to Immigration using it.



### **Migrant Reception Centre – Point Walter**

In May 1944, Prime Minister John Curtin declared there was a need to increase Australia's population of approximately 7 million because war had revealed deficiencies in the country's manpower. In 1947 Australia agreed to accept displaced persons through the International Refugee Organisation. The Government paid their passage and they worked for 2 years in designated places. The Government leased former military bases to house immigrants – in Western Australia camps were located at Point Walter, Graylands, Swanbourne, Belmont and Karrakatta, plus country areas such as Northam. Camp conditions were not luxurious and life was based on a military regime of reveille, inspections, lights out, bed checks and block leaders. Initially, there was a poor standard of hygiene and migrants were expected to wash their utensils in communal washing bowls, while toilets and showers had no doors and there was no hot water.

Point Walter Migrant Reception Centre was operated by the State Government from 1947-69; it was leased to Commonwealth Hostels from 1969 until it closed in mid 1971. The Crown Reserve on which Point Walter was built was vested in the Western Australian Government State Gardens Board. Under State Acts, no Class A Reserve could be alienated without the passage of a special enabling Act. The Department of Defence, Western Command, started processing the camp for disposal in September 1946. On 28 March 1947 the camp was excised under the terms of a 10-year lease from the State Government for use as a reception, training and staging centre for migrants from the United Kingdom. The buildings, excluding the amenities building and prefabricated masonite huts, were purchased in December 1946 by the Department of Lands and the Commonwealth Government through the Disposals Commission on a pound-for-pound basis at a cost of £5,502. The camp was able to accommodate 300 Britons. The camp opened in time to accommodate 250 of the British migrants who arrived from England in September 1947. The camp functioned as a migrant reception and staging centre on a needs-to basis. It was operated by the State Government and used predominantly for British migrants who had been encouraged to come to Western Australia under the Free and Assisted Passage Scheme. During the period 1947-49, it was also used to occasionally accommodate European migrants en-route to the eastern States, when Graylands and Swanbourne military camps were full. In 1959 the hostel's scope for residential eligibility was later broadened to encompass immigrants whose nominators were able to guarantee employment but could not immediately arrange accommodation. This included industry-nominated assisted British migrants and their families such as those brought to Western Australia to work at the Kwinana Refinery Project under the State Migration Plan. British families were often in residence there for months awaiting alternative accommodation. From 1969-72 the Reception depot was taken over by Commonwealth Hostels. The first migrants who were catered for after handover were Czechoslovakian and Yugoslav.

After Commonwealth Hostels ceased using the camp in 1971, the site was used by the Department of Education to host camps during the school holidays and the site became a popular venue for these holiday camps.

### **Point Walter Recreation and Conference Centre**

The deteriorated huts were demolished around 1986 and the present Conference Centre was constructed. Only the Watch House of 1941 remains at the main entrance to the site. In 2005, the Centre was refurbished and new facilities constructed.

### **HISTORIC THEME/S (HCWA THEME/S):**

- Australian Historic Themes: 2.4.2 Migrating to seek opportunity  
4.3 Developing urban institutions  
7.5.4 Going to war.
- HCWA Themes: 101 Immigration, emigration and refugees  
102 Aboriginal occupation  
405 Sport, recreation and entertainment  
501 World wars and other wars.

### **CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:**

Natural remnant landscape and introduced 21st century recreational buildings.

### **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Point Walter Recreation and Conference Centre is a place of cultural heritage significance as a consequence of its social and historical value through initial use as an army training and rehabilitation centre from 1941 in World War II; then as Detention Barracks for POWs and Internees from 1946 to 1947; then as a Migrant Reception Centre following World War II from 1947 to 1971; and currently as a community-use place for recreation and conference use.

### **SIGNIFICANT ITEMS:**

The remnant natural landscape and open cleared spaces; the surviving Watch House building.

**LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE:** Considerable cultural heritage significance.

**MANAGEMENT CATEGORY:** Category A

**DEVELOPMENT CONTROL CODE:** National

- MAIN SOURCES:**
- 'Military Camps/Locations in Australia During WW2', Oz at War;
  - Australian Heritage Council Register of the National Estate documentation for Place ID 100634 'Point Walter Migrant Reception Centre';
  - 'Aliens to Australians', John Curtin's Legacy.

**ASSESSMENT DATE:** 2013

**ASSESSOR:** Ronald Bodycoat AM.KSJ.LFRAIA

