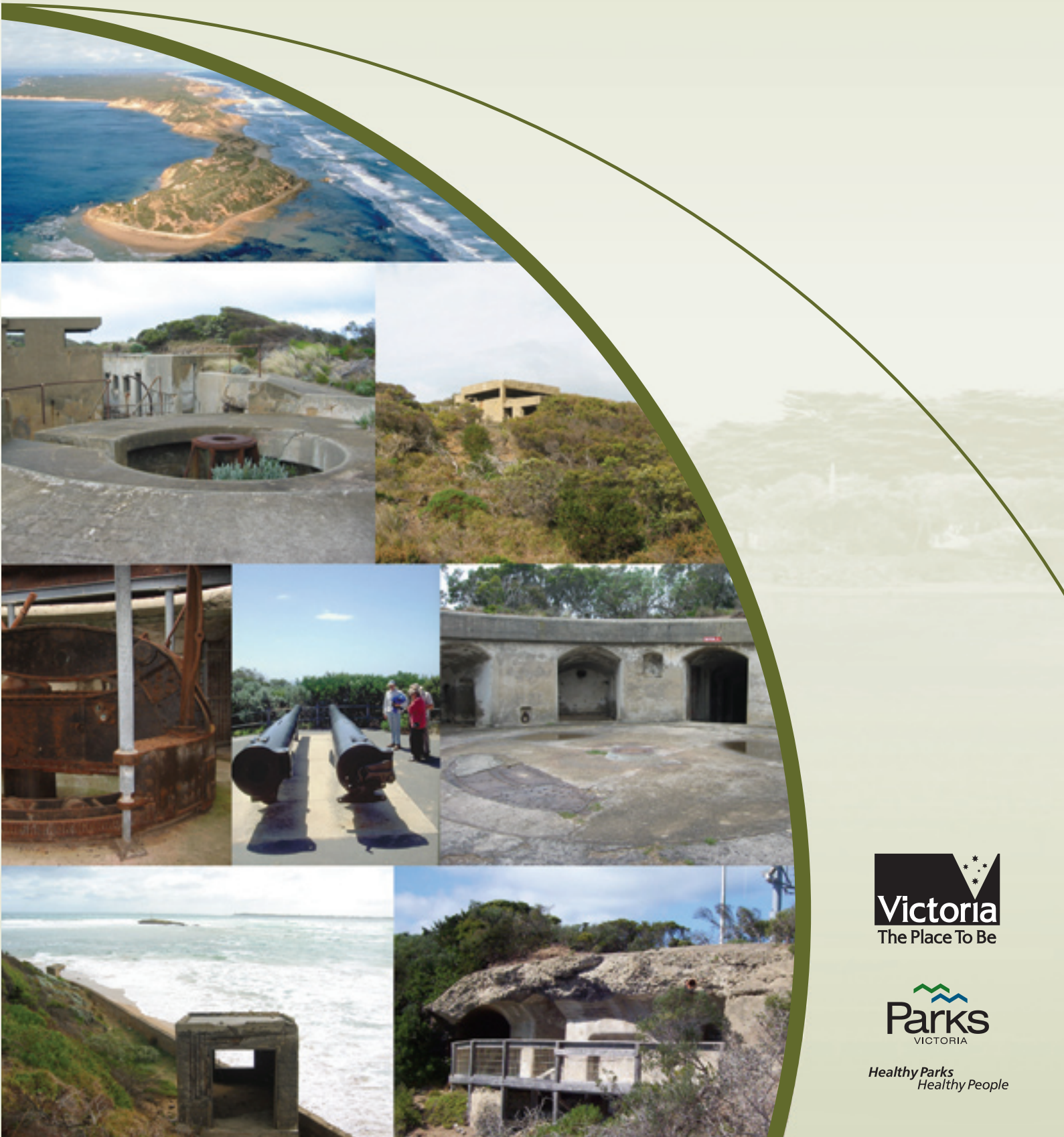


# Point Nepean Forts Conservation Management Plan



**Victoria**  
The Place To Be

**Parks**  
VICTORIA

Healthy Parks  
Healthy People

# POINT NEPEAN FORTS

## CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

Parks Victoria

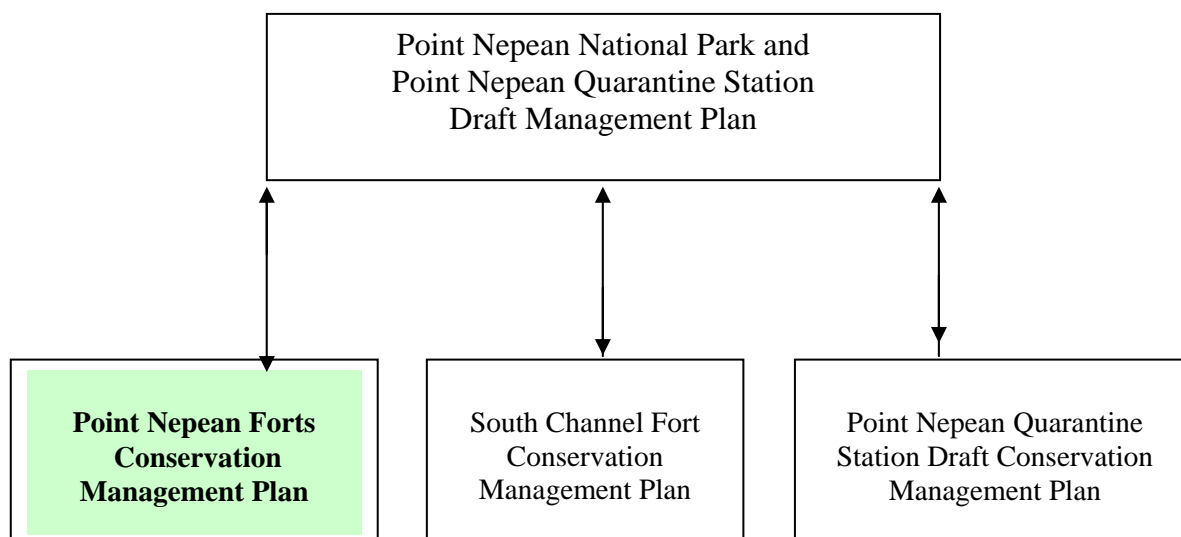
July 2006

*This document is based on the Conservation Plans for the Point Nepean National Park Fortifications (1990) and Gun Emplacement No. 1 (1988) prepared by the Historic Buildings Branch, Ministry Of Housing and Construction, reviewed and updated for currency at the time of creation of the new and expanded Point Nepean National Park in 2005.*



## CONTEXT

This Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the Point Nepean Forts is one of three Conservation Management Plans for historic heritage that have been prepared and/or reviewed to support the Point Nepean National Park and Point Nepean Quarantine Station Management Plan, as shown below:



The Conservation Management Plan establishes the historical significance of all the fortification structures centring on the Fort Nepean complex area, as well as Eagles Nest and Fort Pearce, develops conservation policies for the sites as a whole as well as their individual features, and provides detailed strategies and works specifications aimed at the ongoing preservation of those values into the future.

The Conservation Management Plan for Point Nepean Forts supports the Point Nepean National Park and Point Nepean Quarantine Station Draft Management Plan, setting out policies and actions for the management of historic heritage values in the Forts.

The Point Nepean National Park and Point Nepean Quarantine Station Draft Management Plan together with this Conservation Management Plan sets out to meet the requirements of:

- Sections 324Y (management in accordance for National Heritage management principles)
- Schedules 5B (National Heritage management principles) (EPBC Act Regulation 10.01E)
- Schedule 5A (contents for a Management Plan for a National Heritage Place) of the EPBC Regulations.



# POINT NEPEAN FORTIFICATIONS: CONSERVATION PLAN

	Page No.
A. Introduction	1
B. Heritage Status	7
C. Significance and Conservation Policy	11
D. Condition	15
E. General History	18
F. Fortification Structures	33
F1. Fort Nepean      Emplacement No. 1	41
F2. Fort Nepean      Emplacement Nos. 2A, 3, 4 and adjacent Barracks site.	51
F3. Fort Nepean :    Emplacement No. 5.	63
F4. Fort Nepean :    Emplacement No. 6.	70
F5. Fort Nepean :    Emplacement No. 7 Engine House and Special Beam.	76
F6. Fort Nepean :    Emplacement No. 8.	85
F7. Eagles Nest	89
F8. Fort Pearce	95
F9. Pearce Barracks	100
F10. Cheviot Hill	108
G. General Specification	113
H. Schedule of Drawings and Photographs	118
I. Bibliography	120

## ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

- Schedule of original colour finishes
- Schedule of Signs



## INTRODUCTION

In 1990, a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) was prepared for the Point Nepean fortifications in accordance with the recommendations in the Point Nepean National Park Management Plan – Point Nepean Section (June 1989). A separate Conservation Plan was prepared for Gun Emplacement No 1 in 1988.<sup>1</sup>

The CMP, formally titled the *Point Nepean National Park Fortifications Conservation Plan*,<sup>2</sup> (1990) was prepared for the then State Department of Conservation Forests and Lands following transfer of former defence lands to the State from the Commonwealth. The CMP was prepared by the Historic Places Branch of the Ministry of Housing and Construction, by a team led by Ms. Susan Balderstone.

The Point Nepean National Park, which was proclaimed in 1988, was renamed the Mornington Peninsula National Park in 1995.

Parks Victoria was formed in 1998 upon the merger of the then National Parks Division of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment and Melbourne Parks and Waterways. Parks Victoria is responsible for the management of all Victoria's National and State Parks and manages land at Point Nepean under the provisions of the National Parks Act 1975.

Following agreement between the State and Commonwealth for the transfer of the 205 hectare former Range Area, a new Point Nepean National Park was proclaimed on September 17, 2005. The new park, which includes South Channel Fort, is proposed to be enlarged following the future addition of the 90 hectare Point Nepean Quarantine Station sometime before June 2009. The Point Nepean Quarantine Station is currently managed by the Point Nepean Community Trust on behalf of the Commonwealth.

Throughout this evolution, the CMP (1990) remained the primary guiding document for the conservation management of the forts in accordance with management plans that have applied to the area.

Parks Victoria is currently preparing a management plan for the new Point Nepean National Park and the Point Nepean Quarantine Station in partnership with the Point Nepean Community Trust. As part of the planning process, the *Point Nepean National Park Heritage Conservation Policy 2005* was prepared by Parks Victoria to provide overall policy statements for all of the individual historic zones within the planning area including the Point Nepean Forts, South Channel Fort, the former Range Area and the Quarantine Station (Norris Barracks).

In addition, the 1990 CMP has been reviewed and updated having regard to the nature and extent of works implemented since its preparation and the changes in the condition of the structures in the intervening period. This document is the result of the update for the Point Nepean Forts and includes a



review of the CMP for Gun Emplacement No. 1. It has been prepared by Parks Victoria Team Leader Heritage Programs, Conservation Architect John Grinpukel.

The Statements of Significance for individual fortification structures and complexes, originally prepared as a basis for submission to the then Historic Buildings Council for listing on the Historic Buildings Register, have been adopted in this document. The Appendix to the original document, comprising a photographic record of painted signs associated with the fortifications, has also been retained unaltered, again as a separate volume.

The fortifications in the Park were part of a wider defence system developed for the protection of Port Phillip. Their place in this system is outlined in the unpublished notes by D. Baguley titled "Fortifications of Port Phillip." At the time of writing of this CMP update a new publication by Geoff Bellamy, and to be titled "*Australia's Gibraltar*" which will comprehensively cover the defences of Port Phillip, was in preparation and due for publication in late 2006.<sup>3</sup>

Fig. 1 shows the essential features of such a defence system as designed for a typical Harbour. This map illustrates the General Guiding Principles of the Joint Naval and Military Committee for the defence of colonial ports.<sup>3</sup>

This Conservation Plan covers the main fortification structures extant at Point Nepean, including the emplacements at Fort Nepean, Eagles Nest, Fort Pearce and Cheviot Hill, and Pearce Barracks.

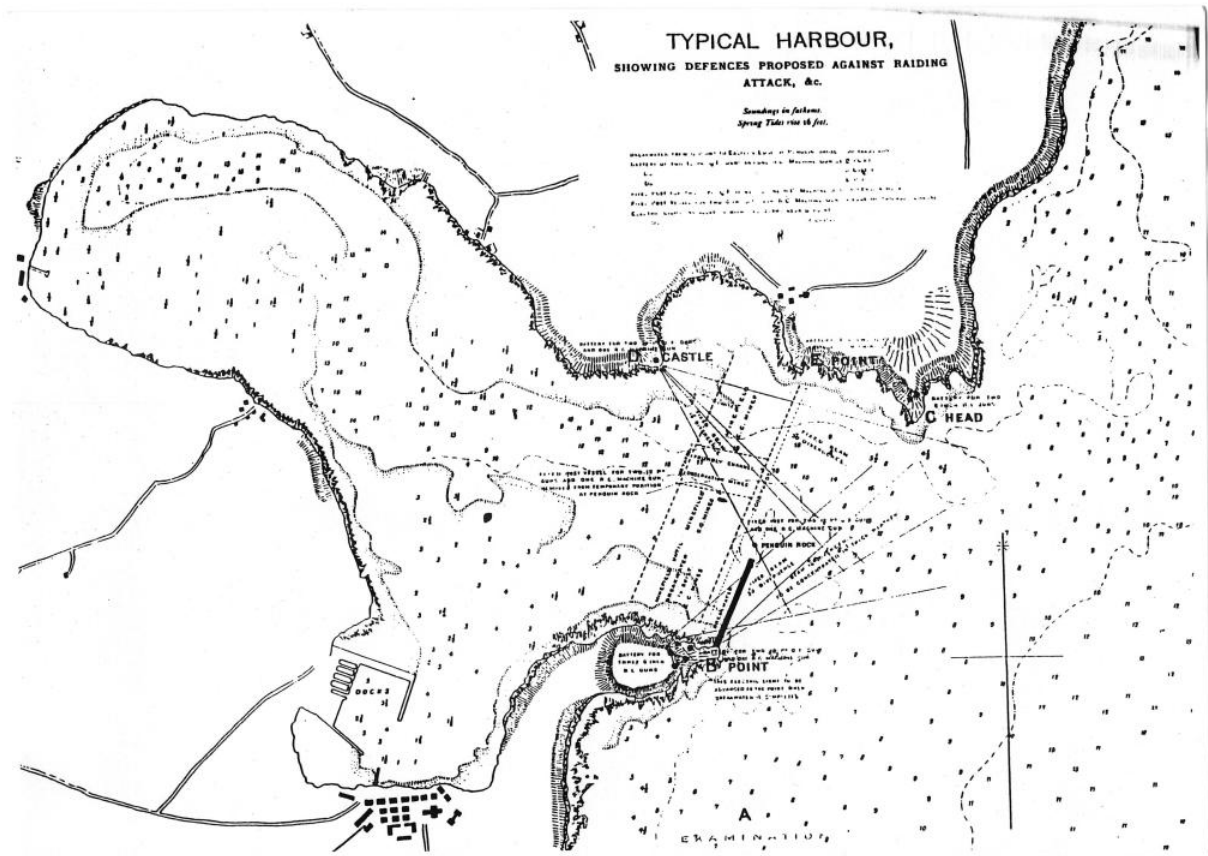
The fortifications were stripped of fittings and equipment in 1958, being declared surplus to Army needs. The remaining structures are generally sound, however face increasing threat from the unstable geomorphology of the area causing land slips in adjacent cliffs and slopes, such as at Eagles Nest, and the highly corrosive environment causing persistent localised damage to the steel and concrete fabric.

Gun mountings for Mark VII guns remain in situ at Forts Nepean and Pearce and at Cheviot Hill and for a 6" disappearing gun at Fort Nepean. Gun barrels from the Fort Nepean Mark VII guns have been returned to the Park on permanent loan from the Department of Defence and are presently displayed on the former parade ground at Fort. Nepean. The gun barrel from the Eagles Nest's 10" disappearing gun is mounted in the Park away from the fortifications at the junction of Defence and McCracken Roads.

Changes in gun and fortification technology over the period from 1880 to 1940 resulted in a rapid evolution of the fortification structures.

The Historic Structures Report identified five temporal phases of development of fortifications: 1878, 1880-1882, 1887-1890, 1910-1916 and 1939-1942. These are referred to as phases 1-5 in this Conservation Plan. Phase 2 in fact covers the period 1880-1886.

The numbering system adopted here for the fortifications at Fort Nepean dates from 1906.<sup>4</sup> Report and covered the guns in place after the completion of the phase 3 works.



Previous numbering systems reflect the earlier phases of construction: the phase 2 emplacements were numbered 1 to 6; however guns were not emplaced in two of these during this phase. The numbering changed to relate to guns rather than emplacements, hence early in phase 3, emplacements nos. 3 and 4 became No. 1, emplacement no. 1 became No. 5, and emplacement no. 5 became No. 4. the construction of new emplacements for additional guns during phase 3 produced No. 6 (no. 1 in 1906) and No. 2 (no. 6 in 1906). The addition of two quick-firing gun emplacements at the end of phase 3 led to renumbering as shown on the 1906 plan to include nos. 7 and 8. In fact there were only 7 guns. as emplacement no. 3 contained not a gun but an armourer's store.

Subsequent renumbering reflects the reduction in the number of guns following the introduction of the longer range Mark VII guns in 1911. At this time No. 6 became A1, No. 5 became B1, No. 1 became H1 and No. 4 became F1.<sup>5</sup> Later again, c1940, when the breech loading gun in No. 4 (F1) and the disappearing gun in No. 1. (H1) became redundant, the remaining Mark VII guns were renumbered so that A1 became F1 and B1 became H1.

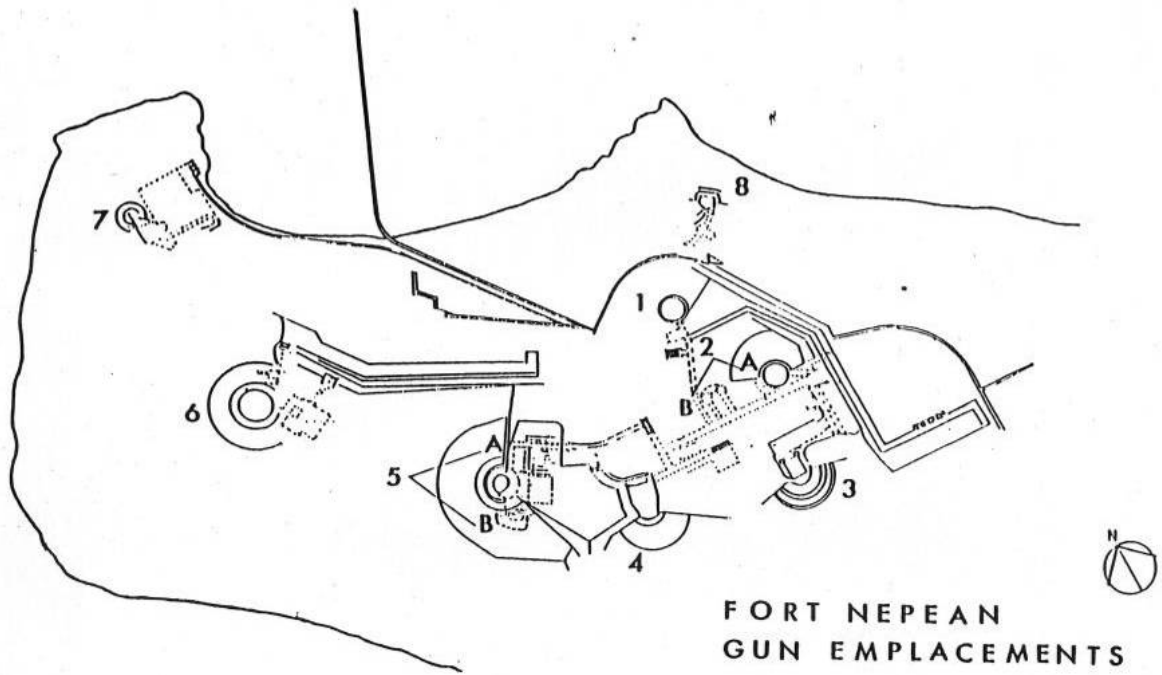


Fig. 2

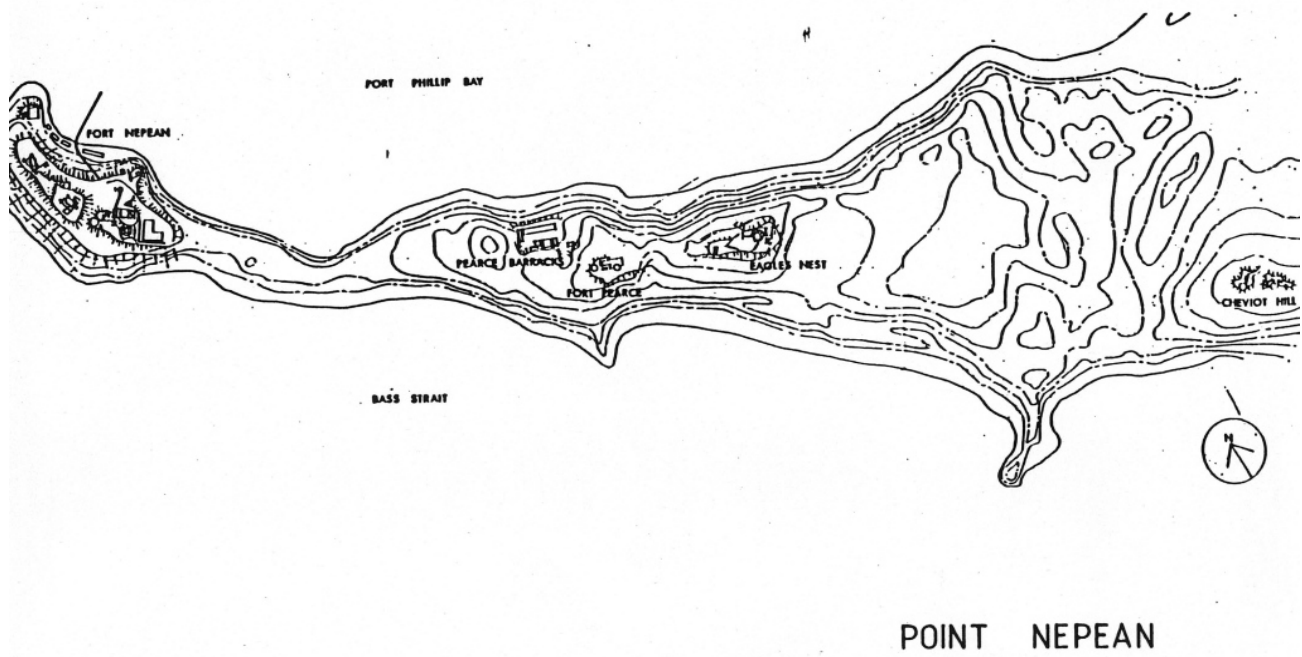


Fig. 3

TABLE

DATE	GUNS AND EMPLACEMENTS										FAGLES	FORT PEARCE	CHEVIOT HILL
	FORT NEPEAN												
	1	2A	2B	3	4	5A	5B	6	7	8			
PHASE 1	4 x 80 lb RML in 2 temporary sandbagged batteries.										-	-	-
PHASE 2 1880 - 86	80 lb RML		80 lb RML	no guns installed	6" BL Cp	80 lb RML in each emplacement							
PHASE 3 1887 - 90	6" BL Hp	converted to observation posts	converted to armourer's shop	6" BL Cp	combined to form No. 5 9.2 BL Hp	9.2 BL Hp	4.7 QF	14 lb QF				10" BL Hp	
PHASE 4 1910 - 15	6" BL Hp	used for water tank	"	"	"	6" mark VII	converted to light emplacement	gun removed to Queens-cliff	6" mk. VII	6" mk. VII	gun removed		
PHASE 5 1939 - 62	gun removed	"	"	conversion to skidding shed	"	" hood	"	"	gun removed to Cheviot Hill	gun removed to Cheviot Hill	"	6" mk. VII	6" mk. VII

Fig. 4

A considerable amount of work as recommended in the 1987 Point Nepean National Park Concept Plan Report was documented by the Historic Buildings Branch of the Ministry of Housing and Construction and carried out as part of the Bicentennial project in 1988, whilst further works as recommended in the 1990 Conservation Plan having been progressively implemented since that time. The items on Existing Structural Condition and Recommended Works in Sections E1-E9 of this Conservation Plan Update are adapted from the 1989 CMP, and largely comprise the works in that Plan that have not been implemented, reviewed and as appropriate revised following detailed condition assessments in accordance with current existing conditions and priorities.

The general history of the fortifications included in Section E was researched and written by F. O'Neill for the Bicentennial Project's interpretation plan and is included here as a framework to sections E1-E9 on individual groups of structures. The Specification included in Section F is an update of that provided in the 1989 Conservation Plan to include current practices and technological developments, and currently active suppliers and companies. The working drawings included in Sections E1-E9 are unchanged from those in the 1989 document, and should be read in the context of the current status of works.

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 Point Nepean National Park Gun Emplacement No.1 Conservation Plan, prepared for Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands, July 1988 Historic Buildings Branch, Ministry of Housing & Construction.
- 2 Point Nepean National Park Fortifications, Conservation Plan, prepared for Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands, January 1990 Historic Buildings Branch, Ministry of Housing & Construction.
- 3 To be published by 'Australian Military History Publications'. As advised by The War Book Shop, Sydney June 2006.
- 4 Circular Dispatch dated 12/5/1893 from the Marquess of Ripon. Australian Archive MP 153/16, Item 28.
- 5 Dwg. Site Plan, Australian Archives MP 338, Folder 1.
- 6 Dwg. "Fort Nepean Battery" F/28, 1911. Source: Victoria Barracks. The number H1 can be discerned painted on the wall of Gun Emplacement No. 1.

## **HERITAGE STATUS**

### **NATIONAL HERITAGE LIST**

Following the establishment of the National Heritage List and the Commonwealth Heritage List under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act in 2003, and the agreement by the Commonwealth government to transfer its remaining defence holdings at Point Nepean to the State in 2004, the whole of Point Nepean, including the forts and the former Quarantine Station, was included on the National Heritage List in June 2006. Inclusion on the National Heritage List means the Forts are subject to the provisions of the EPBC Act. In particular, it strongly encourages the preparation of Management Plans for places entirely within a State or Territory jurisdiction. Provisions however are made within the Act for Bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and States to minimise duplication in the environmental and assessment process. It is likely such an agreement will be implemented between the Commonwealth and Heritage Victoria in relation to Point Nepean as a whole.

A summary of the identified National Heritage Values of the Forts is included in Section C. The full National Heritage List Assessment report is included in the Draft Management Plan for Point Nepean National Park and the Point Nepean Quarantine Station.

### **REGISTER OF THE NATIONAL ESTATE**

The fortifications were included as part of the land at Point Nepean listed in Register of the National Estate in 1988 by the former Australian Heritage Commission. It is described as –

*Historically significant as a major and integral link in the Victorian Colonial Coastal Defence System which contributed to making Port Phillip Bay reputedly the most heavily defended harbour of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the southern hemisphere. The fortifications are the best examples of the development of military technology of the Port Phillip Bay network. These Forts are attributed with firing the first Allied shots of both World Wars.*

Following the abolition of the AHC and establishment of the Australian Heritage Council, and the consequent introduction of the Commonwealth and National Heritage Lists in 2003, the RNE, whilst being retained as an important database for education purposes, no longer retained any statutory heritage protection status.

### **VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER**

The whole of Point Nepean was included on the State Heritage Register in 2004 as number H2030. Whilst its jurisdiction does not cover Commonwealth owned land or assets, the Registration included

the 90 ha Quarantine Station as a pre-emptive step in anticipation of its ultimate transfer to the State of Victoria for addition to the Point Nepean National Park. Whilst the extensive citation focuses primarily on the Quarantine Station, it only briefly addresses the fortifications. The relevant extracts from this citation are included in the Statement of Cultural Significance in Section C of this document.

Inclusion on the State Heritage Register places statutory obligations on Parks Victoria under the Heritage Act 1995. Under this Act a permit is required for works to the place unless specifically exempt. These exemptions are for works generally of a maintenance nature where alterations to the appearance of the place is not involved. The full Permit Exemption statement, applying to the whole of the Registered area, follows:

#### **PERMIT EXEMPTIONS:**

*General Conditions: 1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.*

*General Conditions: 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and the Executive Director shall be notified as soon as possible. Note: All archaeological places have the potential to contain significant sub-surface artefacts and other remains. In most cases it will be necessary to obtain approval from Heritage Victoria before the undertaking any works that have a significant sub-surface component.*

*General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan approved by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: The existence of a Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan endorsed by Heritage Victoria provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan.*

*General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this declaration prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.*

*General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable.*

**Regular Site Maintenance :** *The following site maintenance works are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995, a) regular site maintenance provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground features or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits; b) the maintenance of an item to retain its conditions or operation without the removal of or damage to the existing fabric or the introduction of new materials; c) cleaning including the removal of surface deposits, organic growths, or graffiti by the use of low pressure water and natural detergents and mild brushing and scrubbing; d) repairs, conservation and maintenance to plaques, memorials, roads and paths, fences and gates and drainage and irrigation. e) the replacement of existing services such as cabling, plumbing, wiring and fire services that uses existing routes, conduits or voids, and does not involve damage to or the removal of significant fabric. Note: Surface patina which has developed on the fabric may be an important part of the item's significance and if so needs to be preserved during maintenance and cleaning. Note: Any new materials used for repair must not exacerbate the decay of existing fabric due to chemical incompatibility, obscure existing fabric or limit access to existing fabric for future maintenance. Repair must maximise protection and retention of fabric and include the conservation of existing details or elements.*

**Fire management Duties :** *The following fire management duties are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995, a) Fire management and fire fighting duties provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground features or sub-surface archaeological*

artefacts or deposits; b) Fire management activities such as fuel reduction burns, and fire control line construction, provided all significant historical and archaeological features are appropriately recognised and protected; Note: Fire management authorities should be aware of the location, extent and significance of historical and archaeological places when developing fire management and fire fighting strategies. The importance of places listed in the Heritage Register must be considered when strategies for fire management and management are being developed; c) Ecological burning programs; d) Emergency responses.

**Pest, plant and animal control :** The following pest, plant and animal control activities are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995, a) Pest, plant and animal control activities provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground features or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits; Note: Particular care must be taken with pest, plant and animal control works where such activities may have a detrimental affect on the significant fabric of a place. Such works may include the removal of ivy, moss or lichen from an historic structure or feature, or the removal of burrows from a site that has archaeological values; b) Removal of plants listed as noxious weeds in the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994.

**Landscape Maintenance :** The following landscape maintenance works are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995, a) landscape maintenance works provided the activities do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground features or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits; b) watering, mowing, top-dressing and fertilising necessary for the continued health of plants, without damage or major alterations to layout, contours, plant species or other significant landscape features; c) Management of trees in accordance with Australian Standard; Pruning of Amenity Trees AS 4373; d) Erosion control works where the Park's natural values and significant historic features are threatened; e) Replanting to maintain the landscape character and replacement planting of significant plants.

**Nature Conservation:** The following nature conservation management activities are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995.

a) Management activities which conserve native plant communities in their natural condition, maintain and enhance habitat diversity and provide special protection for significant plant communities.

b) Management activities which conserve native fauna species and maintain the integrity of their habitats, provide special protection for significant fauna and protect genetic diversity of native populations and maintain habitat diversity.

**Public Safety and Security :** The following public safety and security activities are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995, a) public safety and security activities provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground structures or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits; b) the erection of temporary security fencing, scaffolding, hoardings or surveillance systems to prevent unauthorised access or secure public safety which will not adversely affect significant fabric of the place including archaeological features; c) development including emergency stabilisation necessary to secure safety where a site feature has been irreparably damaged or destabilised and represents a safety risk to its users or the public. Note: Urgent or emergency site works are to be undertaken by an appropriately qualified specialist such as a structural engineer, or other heritage professional.

**Signage and Site Interpretation :** The following Signage and Site Interpretation activities are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995, a) signage and site interpretation activities provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground structures or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits; b) the erection of non-illuminated signage for the purpose of ensuring public safety or to assist in the interpretation of the heritage significance of the place or object and which will not adversely affect significant fabric including landscape or archaeological features of the place or obstruct significant views of and from heritage values or items; c) signage and site interpretation products must be located and be of a suitable size so as not to obscure or damage significant fabric of the place; d) signage and site interpretation products must be able to be later removed without causing damage to the significant fabric of the place; Note: The development of signage and site interpretation products must be consistent in the use of format, text, logos, themes and



*other display materials. Note: Where possible, the signage and interpretation material should be consistent with other schemes developed on similar or associated sites. It may be necessary to consult with land managers and other stakeholders concerning existing schemes and strategies for signage and site interpretation.*

**Minor Works :** *Note: Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works may submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits coordinator be contacted.*

#### **NATIONAL TRUST REGISTER**

The Landscape Committee of the National Trust has classified the landscape at Point Nepean. Classification or recording by the National Trust imposes no statutory requirements but often attracts considerable public interest and pressure. There is no separate classification for the Forts on the Point.

#### **MORNINGTON PENINSULA SHIRE PLANNING SCHEME**

At the time of preparation of this update, the forts at Point Nepean were not included within the Mornington Peninsula Shire Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.

**SIGNIFICANCE AND CONSERVATION POLICY**

The following Statement of Cultural Significance for the fortifications at Point Nepean is as provided in the 1990 Conservation Plan, and supplemented with relevant statements from the 2004 Heritage Victoria citation and National Heritage List citation. In addition, Section E of this document provides separate Statements of Significance for the individual key components of the fortifications.

**STATEMENT OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

Point Nepean must be considered as a whole complex, as one fort in the system of the outer defences of Port Phillip. However, certain structures are particularly significant as evidence of individual phases of the development of Point Nepean. These are identified in individual statements of significance in the following sections of this report.

The forts that make up the outer defence system of Port Phillip Bay are one of the most substantial projects ever undertaken by the Victorian Colonial Government in the nineteenth century.

Fort Nepean has some historical significance in firing the first shots of both the First and Second World Wars, which were the only shots fired in anger from any of the Port Phillip batteries.

Fort Nepean, as the fighting station of the North Melbourne Battery also has some historical significance through its association with Sir John Monash, commanding officer of the North Melbourne Battery from 1897 to 1908.

The forts illustrate the major advances that were occurring in military design and engineering throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. They are considered to be the most substantial and extensive system of fortifications in Australia.

By 1890 Port Phillip Bay was regarded as the most heavily fortified port of the British Empire in the Southern Hemisphere, leading to its title "The Gibraltar of the South".

Point Nepean and Fort Queenscliff were manned during both World Wars, however the other forts were largely redundant by 1911 when long range artillery at the Heads provided adequate protection for the entrance to the bay.

Point Nepean is second only in scale to Fort Queenscliff which retains its status as the premier fort. Point Nepean is less intact than Queenscliff having been vacated over forty years ago with much metal and joinery having been removed.

The nature of the terrain at Point Nepean determined the design of its fort complex, which is quite different from the others. Fort Queenscliff and Swan Island bear some similarity to each other in form and layout, whilst South Channel Fort is an artificial island of unique and revolutionary design.

**SUMMARY**

Point Nepean is considered to be the best example within the Port Phillip defence system of a large fortification complex exhibiting the changes in military engineering throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, containing major developments from 1880, 1890, 1910 and 1940.

**EXTRACT FROM VICTORIAN HERITAGE REGISTER CITATION 2004**

*Point Nepean was a major part of the Victorian coastal defence system which made Port Phillip Bay reputedly the most heavily defended harbour of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the southern hemisphere. It is said that the fortifications at Point Nepean are the best examples demonstrating the development of military technology of the Port Phillip Bay network. Remaining buildings and structures from the defence use of the site include the gun emplacements, light emplacements, observation posts, tunnels, Pearce Barracks, Fort Pearce, Eagle's Nest, and the Engine House, and a number of archaeological sites such as Happy Valley, the site of a World War II camp.*

*The area contained observation points associated with the fortifications, observation points for range firing at sea targets and range points for such firing ....*

*Point Nepean Defence and Quarantine Precinct is historically significant in the history of defence in Victoria from its first use as one of a number of colonial defence installations round Port Phillip Bay, (and) as an important Commonwealth defence site before and during the two World Wars...*

**SUMMARY OF NATIONAL HERITAGE LIST VALUES**

The National Heritage List Citation Summary of Significance states that the fortifications 'illustrate British military design and technology of the 1870's and 1880's, similar to Middle Head, Sydney, overlaid by changes in imperial armaments and Second World War coastal defences', and that Fort Nepean in particular 'demonstrate(s) the geo-political importance of coastal defences ... in protecting the Australian colonies as part of the British Empire'.

The National Heritage List assessment identifies the Point Nepean Forts as having outstanding heritage value to the nation under the following criteria –

*Criterion (a) - Importance in the course, or pattern of Australia's cultural history :-*

- first shots of WW1 and WW2 fired from Point Nepean
- aspects of its defence use as part of a strategic outer line of defence of Melbourne's ports and harbours since the 1870's, following resolution by the British government that colonies with responsible government should bear the cost of their own defence.

*Criterion (b) - Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Australia's cultural history :-*

- as part of the system of defence of Port Phillip Bay, best illustrates British military design and technology of the 1870's and 1880's, under the influence of Jervois and Scratchley and is therefore rare.

*Criterion (d) - importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of Australia's cultural places :-*

- as part of a strategic outer line in the defence of Melbourne's ports and harbours since the 1870's, surviving fabric clearly illustrates the implementation and operation of the fortifications, including the General Guiding Principles employed for a typical harbour under the Joint Naval and Military Committee for the defence of colonial ports by 1893. These include overlapping fields of fire from fortifications on headlands overlooking the approaches and channels and supporting barracks, all features employed at Point Nepean under the influence of the Jervois-Scratchley reports of 1877.

*Criterion (h) - special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Australia's cultural history.*

- association with Sir John Monash, its commander officer, and Commander of Australian forces in WW1.

The full citation of Point Nepean's National Heritage Listing is included in the Draft Management Plan for Point Nepean National Park and the Point Nepean Quarantine Station.

**CONSERVATION POLICY**

*The fort structures are to be conserved<sup>1</sup> with the minimum amount of clearing, consolidation, reconstruction, preservation and public safety measures required to maintain the structures and adequately interpret them to the public in accordance with the management plan for the Point Nepean National Park and the Point Nepean Quarantine Station.*

*Presentation of the site shall interpret the history and development of the site with minimal physical intrusions consistent with the need for visitors to be self-guiding.*

**BASIS**

The basis for this approach is that the fort sites are considered unique in their present ruinous, half-buried, vegetated form, providing a romantic experience in a culturally significant but semi-wild, natural environment.

This type of experience is recognised as being of value in itself to the visitor and is not to be confused with the experience of visiting a reconstructed, and possibly semi-operating complex of buildings, which is available elsewhere such as at Fort Queenscliff.

Since the forts became redundant, they have been stripped of most of their fittings and fixtures. Additionally, a significant number of buildings and structures have been lost or removed. Predominantly of timber construction, these include barracks buildings, the jetty, tramline, various stores and other ancilliary facilities. However sufficient intact remnants of each phase of development of fortification technology are available to demonstrate the significance of Point Nepean; reconstruction is not required for interpretation purposes.

**ADDITIONAL PUBLIC ACCESS**

Whilst there is little need to make further areas publicly accessible in the foreseeable future, the provision of access to additional areas will be considered only if they can materially enhance the forts' interpretation, or to potentially substitute for any currently open structures which may need to be closed in the future due to reasons of public safety.

**FOOTNOTES**

- 1 Burra Charter Definitions, see Appendix 1.

**CONDITION AND CONSERVATION WORKS PRIORITIES**

The fortifications at Point Nepean largely comprise of the massive concrete and masonry structure remnants of long redundant, decommissioned and dismantled defence facilities in a largely ruinous, half-buried, vegetated form. The foundations on which the structures were built comprise of recent wind blown sand overlying older dune sand deposits cemented to form calcarenite rock.<sup>1</sup> A number of the fort structures were built adjacent to steep slopes or cliff faces above the ocean or the bay, which are subject to significant natural erosion and movement and the collapse of old sea walls. Such action has caused progressive deterioration of the structural integrity of the forts in a number of key specific locations, and continue to threaten the retention of Eagles Nest and the future interpretation of other fortification structures.

A number of coastal studies have been undertaken over the years, particularly since the 1970's. Early reports identify erosion and collapse of seawalls along the Port Phillip Bay side dating back as far as 1917 due to the refraction of waves following their passage through the Heads. The collapse and undermining of the seawalls on the Port Phillip Bay side is primarily due to their construction on sands without adequate footings. Erosion is evident today along the entire section of coast between Fort Nepean and Observatory Point, including active erosion of primary dunes between The Bend and Observatory Point. Comparatively, the old seawalls along the Bass Strait coast at Fort Nepean and the Narrows are in sound condition despite exposure to the high energy sea conditions. This may be due to the natural protection provided by extensive rock platforms and/or solid foundations.

The retardation of this impact would involve geomorphologic stabilisation against wind and wave erosion, and subsequent movement of the dunes and sandstone cliff substrates. These are major issues and recognised as requiring serious attention. However they are also subject to further coastal dynamics research and broader coastal management policy, and would involve major engineering works of a scale requiring interagency resourcing and cooperation.

Whilst stabilisation of the surviving forts fabric against atmospheric impacts of corrosion and weathering is a key conservation focus, displacement of the forts structures resulting from subsidence failure of the foundation material in this situation is largely unavoidable and irreversible, and as such the priority issue for their management must be to minimise resultant risk to visitors and personnel. Thus in situations where straightforward and effective stabilisation actions are not sufficient to arrest structural deterioration, regular monitoring of decaying masonry shall be undertaken. Where deterioration develops to pose an unacceptable level of risk to visitors, the approach will be to close the area to public access.

Notwithstanding however, representations to government and its relevant agencies need to be actively maintained for the commitment of appropriate levels of major works funding specifically dedicated to the stabilisation of the area's dunes and cliffs through sea wall repair and construction of rock revetments.

**PREVIOUS WORKS**

The opening of the Point Nepean Forts area for public access and display in the early 1990's was accompanied by the provision of a range of visitor amenity, safety and interpretation infrastructure including walkways, barriers and handrails, protective mesh screens and gates, toilets, fixed interpretive displays and signage, and an innovative and evocative audio interpretation system in the main central tunnel complex. Many of these works were as identified for implementation in the 1990 Conservation Management Plan.

In addition, and progressively, over the years since, a number of major conservation works included in the 1990 CMP have been carried out on the forts, including

- ~ stabilisation works to Gun No.1
- ~ replacement of the asphalt roof membrane to the Engine House at Fort Nepean
- ~ Repair of the long stairs at Fort Nepean
- ~ Some rock revetment repair works between the Fort Nepean Engine House and The Narrows.
- ~ Replacement of waterproof membranes over magazines at Fort Pearce and Gun Emplacement 5,
- ~ Concrete repairs and metal stabilisation to the Emplacement No. 5 gun canopy.
- ~ Floor repair works in the main tunnel.

Whilst public access was provided to most areas at the time of opening, due largely to structural movement and safety concerns arising from foundation instability, visitor access to several areas, particularly at Eagle's Nest and Fort Pearce, has needed to be either initially or subsequently restricted.

**FUTURE WORKS PRIORITIES**

Apart from the geomorphological stabilisation works to the Point Nepean coastal slopes and cliffs referred to above, The primary focus of conservation works at the forts into the foreseeable future is to achieve a sustainable level of stabilisation of their surviving built fabric through combating the effects of the persistent corrosive coastal environment. This is a widespread issue across the complex, and requires continuous, progressive and prioritised attention if long term survival is to be achieved.

Notwithstanding the subterranean nature of many of the structures, this essentially comprises of a range of minor and moderate scale repair works which can be successfully applied to retard such deterioration. Together with a practical preventative maintenance regime, this would contribute to the stabilisation of fabric and the prolonging of life of key significant components, all in the context of demand for visitor access, interpretation and safety. Such actions include corrosion treatment of surface metal, remnant joinery preservation, surface concrete repairs, protection of delicate paintwork, practically achievable waterproofing repairs, and 'housekeeping' tasks like maintenance of drainage systems and control of

invasive vegetation. The approach to such treatment for the general groups of fabric deterioration is covered by the General Specification included as Section F in this document.

The extent of the fort areas currently open to the public is very adequate to provide a meaningful visitor interpretive experience of the forts. However, where such areas are exhibiting structural deterioration, regular monitoring is required to determine the rate of change and the subsequent the level of risk to visitors. Assessment must then be made as to the most appropriate response, ranging from temporary repairs to major structural stabilisation, or to close the area to public access. The importance of the location to the visitor experience is of major consideration in this assessment.

A key area for priority consideration in this regard is the Engine House, where foundation movement has resulted in significant cracking to the brickwork and reinforced concrete in its south east corner. As a major throughpoint on the primary visitor interpretation route, this area is a priority for remedial attention. Formal monitoring and structural assessment will help indicate whether continual movement is occurring and the nature of necessary remedial action.

The other priority works resulting from potential risk to the public is the removal of the hazardous asbestos cladding of the Fort Pearce buildings. Although public access is not currently available to this site, the extent and deteriorated condition of the material, and its potential to generate airborne fibres makes its removal essential.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Geological Survey of Victoria 1:63,360 Series Queenscliff Sheet (Reference 2)



## GENERAL HISTORY

### VICTORIA'S GIBRALTAR

Fort Nepean, known in the 1880s as Victoria's Gibraltar, was an essential part of the defence network of colonial Victoria. Victoria's defences, in turn, were planned in the larger context of British imperial defences. One of a number of defence installations round Port Phillip Bay, the fortifications on the tip of the Nepean Peninsula, together with those at Queenscliff, Swan Island, Fort Franklin and South Channel Fort, were designed to protect Victoria from attack by raiders who might penetrate the Heads and make their way up the Bay to hold the city of Melbourne to ransom.<sup>1</sup>

Victoria's defence was in its early years the province of the British navy. Its internal security was at first also safeguarded by the presence of British forces. Although the protection by the mother country was valued by the colonists, it nevertheless made Victoria vulnerable to attack by enemies of the Empire. Thus, France, the United States, Russia and China were named as potential threats to Victorian security.<sup>2</sup> The Crimean War (1853-1856) stirred the colonial patriots to take some responsibility for their own defence. In 1854, a volunteer rifle brigade was formed in Melbourne. Drilling and military exercises were carried out by the volunteers at night and weekends.<sup>3</sup>

The discovery of gold in Victoria meant that the colony now had something to defend. As the Argus warned its readers

**... in the event of war we are in a very defenceless state and that the fact of it being known all over the world that we have a few millions, worth of solid gold within cannon shot of the Bay is a circumstance which renders us peculiarly liable to attack.**<sup>4</sup>

British troops were partially withdrawn in 1860, when they were sent to New Zealand to fight in the second Maori War. They were completely withdrawn in 1870. Volunteer enthusiasm had waned after the Crimean War ended but the withdrawal of British troops was an incentive to plan Victorian defences and improve the local force.<sup>5</sup>

### COASTAL DEFENCES

In 1860, Victoria applied to the British Government for the services of an officer of the Royal Engineers to superintend the erection of defences. Captain Peter Scratchley was appointed and advised the provision of batteries in Hobson's Bay and at the Heads.<sup>6</sup>

### 1877 SCARE

Russian activity against Turkey in 1877 with the possibility of Britain's involvement may have been a factor in the appointment of a team of advisers from the Royal Engineers to report on Victorian defences in that year. In June 1877 Colonel Sir William Jervois and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Scratchley

recommended that Port Phillip be defended by a battery and keep at Queenscliff, a fort at Point Nepean and batteries at Swan Island and South Channel Island, with mines in the South and West Channels.<sup>7</sup>

Towards the end of 1878, a report was circulated by the press of Australia that the Russian Government had contemplated making a raid upon some of the Australian ports:

**... the Russian admiral at Yokohama ... who possessed the instinct of a true buccaneer, became almost too frank... on one occasion he went so far as to say, striking his thigh at the same time with considerable energy "Fancy one, after all, missing such a chance! Six millions sterling! Why, there would not have been such a coup since the days of the Spanish galleons".<sup>8</sup>**

### 1882 SCARE

The European crisis in 1882, when it seemed that Britain would become involved in a major war, was decisive in encouraging Victoria to build defences. A general European war with Britain isolated would make the colonies vulnerable to attack.<sup>9</sup>

As Victorian politician James Service put it in a speech to the electors of Castlemaine in 1883, Victoria had no consistent policy on defence in the nineteenth century:

**Upon the subject of colonial defence we grow hot or cold alternately year by year. One year we get scared and spend any amount of money, then we have a fit of economy and do nothing...<sup>10</sup>**

However, following the 1883 election, Victoria set up its own Ministry of Defence, a step not taken by the other states.<sup>11</sup>

### INVASION

The Victorian colonists did not fear a large scale invasion. They believed that the British navy was sufficient protection against invasion by a large body of troops, since an enemy would not risk its army so far from home. A force of 10,000 troops, a force large enough for the task, would be difficult to transport and maintain; its ships would be vulnerable to attack by the British navy.<sup>12</sup>

More probable was "a sudden attack with a view to plunder" by "some dashing fellow in command of an enemy's frigate, or a privateer, who will seek an entrance into Port Phillip with the view either of laying the City of Melbourne under an embargo, or destroying the shipping ...<sup>13</sup>

Certainly Victoria wavered in its determination to provide adequately for its own defence, but the 1880s provided enough incentive as well as enough prosperity to complete its fortifications at the Heads by 1890.

## BUILDING THE FORT

A map of the area shows a rocket and mortar shed was built right at the tip of Point Nepean by 1876. This was probably used for life-saving equipment. Plans for a jetty dated 1878 show that preparations for defences had started.<sup>14</sup>

In 1878 a portable house, possibly intended for workmen, was erected at a cost of £188, a road was laid out and almost 9000 sandbags were unloaded to construct a temporary emplacement for four 80 pounder guns. The military reserve was fenced in 1879. Although plans dated November 1878 for a jetty survive, this was not built until 1882. Prior to this, the military may have used the Quarantine Station jetty or the Cattle jetty to unload building materials and equipment.<sup>15</sup>

In 1882 work began on the first permanent gun emplacements. The first delivery of powder to Point Nepean was in April 1885, which suggests that guns were then in place.<sup>16</sup>

Construction work continued during 1885 on another battery for 80 pounder guns and was completed by March 1886.<sup>17</sup>

## 1885 SCARE

The Russian designs on Afghanistan in 1885 alarmed Britain and therefore the colonies. This alarm was particularly felt in Victoria. As the Council of War commented later:

**the threat of war acted like an electric shock upon the community**<sup>18</sup>

## THE DISAPPEARING GUN

The next phase of building at Point Nepean began in 1887 to adjust to the new developments in artillery. The disappearing" gun on an hydropneumatic carriage had been developed in the 1870s. After firing, it recoiled below the parapet to enable re-loading to be done in safety. Thus it did not present a target to the ship it was attacking. At Nepean one gun pit was converted to receive a 6" gun of this type, two others were converted for a 9.2" gun, and a new replacement for a 9.2" gun was built. In 1889 a contract for a 6" emplacement, passage, etc., was signed and a weatherboard barracks was begun in the same year.<sup>19</sup>

## EAGLES NEST

At one of the highest points along the Nepean Peninsula, about one kilometre east of Point Nepean, the battery known as Eagle's Nest housed a 10" disappearing gun on an hydropneumatic carriage.<sup>20</sup>

The buildings at Point Nepean reflect intense activity in the 1880s and early 1890s to keep Victoria's defences up to date with the latest inventions in military hardware. The impetus for this came from the international political scene, with a continuing sequence of war scares. There were said to be over 200 war scares in Australia during the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

## 1888 SCARE

The accidental cutting of the cable linking Melbourne and London on 30 June 1888 set off a general war alarm in the colony. A headline in the Age newspaper read:

**ALARMING WAR SCARE  
GUNBOAT ALBERT SENT TO THE HEADS  
VICTORIAN FLEET READY FOR ANY EMERGENCY**

The Premier reacted by ordering a mobilization trial, in an attempt to test the defences without alarming the general population.

The Defence Department called out the Naval Brigade and directed the men of the Harbour Trust Battery to reinforce the garrison artillery. These men were distributed between the Queenscliff, Point Nepean and Swan Island forts. The gunboat Albert was sent to Queenscliff, and the search lights used at the Heads. Submarine mines were laid in the channels. According to the Argus, the re-armament of Fort Nepean had been in progress for some weeks and gun emplacements had been prepared. Three guns were placed in barges on Saturday 30 June and sent down the Bay. Once these are installed, claimed the report, "the fort will be one of the best equipped in the Southern Hemisphere".<sup>22</sup>

The Age was more critical of the defence preparations:

**It is unfortunate that the present scare should arise when both the Point Nepean and Point Franklin forts are almost completely dismantled, only one 9 inch gun and two 80 pounders being in position and ready for action at Nepean fort. Certainly one of the most recent pieces of artillery has been placed in the latter fort during the past week, but it is stated that the proper ammunition is not ready for it.**<sup>23</sup>

## THE GUNS

The Age claimed that the heaviest piece of artillery in the colony was the 9.2 inch Armstrong breech loader, with its hydro-pneumatic carriage, which was mounted at Fort Nepean on 25 June 1888. It was brought down from Melbourne by the steamer Maud. With the carriage platform, and shield, the entire apparatus weighed 64 tons. It was installed by 30 men of the Victorian Artillery, supervised by Lieutenant Umphelby and had to be moved 'almost entirely by manual labour'. The weapon's range was 10,200 yards and the weight of each shot was 380 pounds.<sup>24</sup>

First fired on 30 June 1888 at the time of the Russian scare, this gun and carriage

**was mounted and fired under the most unfavourable circumstances viz. the pit not being made, or rather consisting of a huge excavation in the sand which had to be lowered at strong sand storm blowing the whole of the time the gun was being mounted. The sand was so bad that in the evening we used to cover all parts of carriage with tarpaulins, cases etc, and in the morning you would find the whole lot covered with sand.**<sup>25</sup>

With evident satisfaction, the Queenscliff local paper described Point Nepean's guns in 1889 as "a family of dealers of death and destruction". This florid prose was hardly justified: the guns at Fort Nepean had not at this time been fired in time of conflict and had caused no loss of life.<sup>26</sup>

By 1890, Charles Dilke's assessment of Victoria's overall defences was a tribute to the planners:

**The Australians are--- to be congratulated upon the perfection of the local defences of Melbourne – the best defended commercial city of the Empire.**<sup>27</sup>

There were three main types of guns emplaced at Point Nepean during its long history.

1. rifled muzzle loading guns
  - a) 80 pounder (4)
  - b) 9 inch (1)
  
2. breech loading guns
  - a) on a central pivot mounting
    - i) 6 inch (1)
    - ii) 6 inch Mark VII (4)
  
  - b) on a hydropneumatic mounting
    - i) 6 inch (2)
    - ii) 9.2 inch (2)
    - iii) 10 inch (1)
  
3. quick-firing guns
  - a) 14 pounder (1)
  - b) 4.7 inch (1)

### **DISAPPEARING GUNS**

were breech loading guns on hydropneumatic carriages. The gun could be loaded in safety in the pit and emerged only for a moment before it fired and retracted. Thus the advantage of the disappearing gun was that it was difficult for a ship to see.<sup>28</sup>

### **QUICK FIRING GUNS**

These used 'fixed ammunition', that is, the projectile and cartridge were made up in one piece. Each round could be handled and loaded faster than before and there was no need to swab out the chamber of the gun before firing as the charge was exploded in the metal cartridge which was ejected.<sup>29</sup>

### **6 INCH MARK VII GARRISON GUNS**

The 6 inch gun was the standard imperial gun used from 1911 to after World War II.

### **GUN CREWS**

A newspaper report of 1889 described the way the guns were fired. A gun crew usually consisted of nine men, but firing could be achieved by as few as five gunners. The first task was to sponge the gun out.

The charge (powder and shot or shell) was brought from the magazine on a trolley and raised by a derrick to the muzzle of the gun where it was rammed home by two men.

**The charge is then pricked through the vent by a steel pricker which pierces the flannel bag containing the charge. A friction tube is placed in the vent to which is attached a lanyard, the gun is then trained and the sights being brought to bear, it is fired.**

The target used for practice was towed by a boat and the results of the shots were conveyed back to the gunners by flag signals. The steam launch Mars was used for target practice within Port Phillip Bay.<sup>30</sup>



Fig. 5. 6-inch gun, Fort Nepean c. 1943 (Australian War Memorial, Canberra ID 051186)

### THE FORTIFICATIONS

Beneath the gun emplacements was a complex arrangement of passages and compartments designed to prevent accidents. Compartments for shell, shot and fuses were separated from those for the gunpowder cartridges. The supply to the guns by lifts and hoists was so arranged that the components of a complete round of ammunition never came together until they were actually loaded into the gun. Candles illuminated the magazines through glazed and sealed apertures to prevent gunpowder dust from coming into contact with a naked flame. Behind the magazine chambers ran a series of lamp passages, so that the lamps could be filled from behind. Copper nails were used in the woodwork to prevent sparks.<sup>31</sup>

Artillerymen coming on duty left their clothing and boots at the entrance to the magazine called the shifting lobby. Here they put on working overalls and exchanged their hobnailed boots for canvas shoes as a safety precaution. They had to empty their pockets of metal and matches before entering the magazines.<sup>32</sup>

### MANNING THE FORTS

The Victorian Artillery, a permanent force, manned the forts of Queenscliff, Nepean, Franklin, Swan Island and South Channel Fort. In 1888, some 150 men were stationed at the forts. The remainder of the Victorian Artillery were stationed in Melbourne, doing guard duty at Government House and other posts. The force of 150 permanent soldiers was not sufficient to man the guns without reinforcements.<sup>33</sup> To man the defences fully the militia were needed as well. The militia were civilians who were paid to attend training parades and annual camps, and were given specialised tasks within the Victorian Military Force. They were to be called out in the event of hostilities to their war stations.



*Fig. 6. Looking west to Fort Nepean, c.1946. Barracks blocks and other ancilliary timber buildings are visible, now demolished. As well, sea walls constructed to retard erosion of the Point are clearly apparent. (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, ID PO1108.011)*

## LIVING CONDITIONS

The men who manned the guns at Fort Nepean were brought from the headquarters at Queenscliff by launch. The conditions they lived under in the 1880s were complained of by six men court martialled for refusing to obey orders in July 1885. One of their grounds for complaint was:

**That we were treated more like dogs than men, in fact used like convicts. We were made to do the work of horses, and indeed, horses get better accommodation than we had at Queenscliff and Point Nepean.<sup>34</sup>**

## EASTER CAMPS

Since the militia trained mainly at night, their experience would have been very limited if it had not been for the training they received at the annual Easter manoeuvres.

In 1881, an Easter Camp was organized at Point Nepean by the militia themselves, who paid any expenses out of corps funds. The Government agreed to accommodate the soldiers at the Quarantine Station. The five hospital buildings were used as barracks for the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Red Rifles for four days. Two steamers were chartered to bring the men and the horses of the mounted officers down the Bay. Field manoeuvres were held on the Saturday in "the country between the Quarantine Station and Sorrento, a hilly, sandy district covered with brackens and patched with scrub". The men were told that an enemy occupied a position on a hill between the station and Portsea, and was to be driven out and be made to retreat to Sorrento.<sup>35</sup>

The official report by Major Templeton expressed satisfaction with the exercise but the Age reported disapprovingly that not all took the manoeuvres seriously. During the afternoon, five deserters were found in the Nepean Hotel; it took a sergeant and twelve men to arrest and imprison them. On the Saturday evening, all the men were in bed by ten o'clock with the exception of Majors Templeton and Freeman and fifteen men who were absent without leave. The absentees were retrieved from a ball at Portsea. They arrived back to find the commanding officer had decided to sound an alarm to see how smartly the men would turn out of their beds and appear on parade. The bugler sounded the alarm at 11 o'clock and in thirteen minutes every man in the place was on parade and ready for action. It is not clear whether the Portsea revellers joined in.<sup>36</sup>

Other Easter camps held at Queenscliff involved artillery practice for the militia at Fort Nepean and the other forts.<sup>37</sup>

## SIR JOHN MONASH AND FORT NEPEAN

In 1887 the artillerymen and engineers attached to Victoria's forts numbered almost one thousand men. A small proportion of these were permanent soldiers but the majority were militia.



On 3 March 1887 John Monash was formally attached to the North Melbourne Battery (Metropolitan Brigade) of the Garrison Artillery whose fixed guns defended the Victorian ports. The Battery consisting of permanent soldiers and militia had Fort Nepean as its fighting station. Monash rose through the ranks of lieutenant, captain and major in the Battery to become its commanding officer in 1897.

Before joining the North Melbourne Battery, however, Monash had been disillusioned by his early contacts with the militia. "The militia is a fraud and bristles with ill-management", he wrote, "I have little heart to bother about it further". His experience in the battery changed his mind: when he transferred to the Australian Intelligence Corps in 1908, he described his 21 years in the North Melbourne Battery as the best years of his life.

Since the Nepean fort would be the first to come into action in the event of hostilities, it was particularly attractive to the romantic young soldier. One of John Monash's fantasies was that he might have charge of the seaward guns at Point Nepean and be the first to fire at a hostile fleet.<sup>38</sup>

Monash's experience in the coastal artillery is seen by his biographer Geoffrey Serle as crucial to his later career as commander of the Australian forces in World War I. It was at Fort Nepean and in the North Melbourne Battery that Monash "learned to know and understand Australian volunteer soldiers".<sup>39</sup>

## **FEDERATION**

After federation, defence ceased to be a State responsibility: the state military forces were re-organised into a unified Commonwealth Military Force from 1901. The administration of the military establishment at Point Nepean was taken over by the Commonwealth.

## **NEXT PHASE OF BUILDING**

The next phase of building at Point Nepean was designed to accommodate changes in armament technology. The 6 inch Mark VII guns installed in 1911 remained in use until the end of World War II. A new battery (1911) and barracks (1917) were built at Fort Pearce.

## **WORLD WAR I**

During World War 1, the Nepean garrison's numbers of artillerymen and engineers increased. The engineers at Point Nepean were responsible for the searchlights which were directed at the stretch of water at the Rip to show up enemy ships. The engines to work the search lights and provide other power at the fort were housed in the engine house near the jetty.

## **FIRST SHOT**

The first British shot of World War I was fired by the Royal Australian Garrison Artillery from a 6 inch Mark VII gun at Fort Nepean.

The German steamer Pfalz left Victoria Dock on 5 August 1914, just before war was proclaimed, with Captain Robinson of the pilot service on board. At Portsea, the vessel was halted by the s.s. Alvina but given clearance since advice of the outbreak of war had not yet been received. A message was then received at Fort Nepean that war had been declared and the fire commander, Lieutenant Morris, was ordered to stop the Pfalz. Signals were hoisted at Point Nepean calling on the ship to stop. When the first shot was fired, Captain Robinson with difficulty convinced the captain of the Pfalz that the next would hit the ship. The vessel was brought back to Portsea, where both ship and crew were placed under arrest.<sup>40</sup>

An account of the event by one of the gunners survives:

**... the tide was flowing very fast when we had the word to fire and I pressed the electrical trigger and saw the shot land with a splash in the water; the splash went right up over the bridge of the ship ... The last order we had was "Stop her or sink her".<sup>41</sup>**

The Pfalz was refitted at Williamstown and renamed the Boorara. She served as an Australian transport for the duration of the war.<sup>42</sup>

#### GUARDING THE HEADS DURING WORLD WAR 1

The gunners and engineers stationed at Fort Nepean during World War I found their duties frustrating. Their newspaper, the Fort Critic, which circulated amongst the men at the forts of Queenscliff, Pearce, Franklin and South Channel from its editorial office at Nepean expressed some of their frustrations.

One contributor in a poem entitled "In Self- Defence" complained of

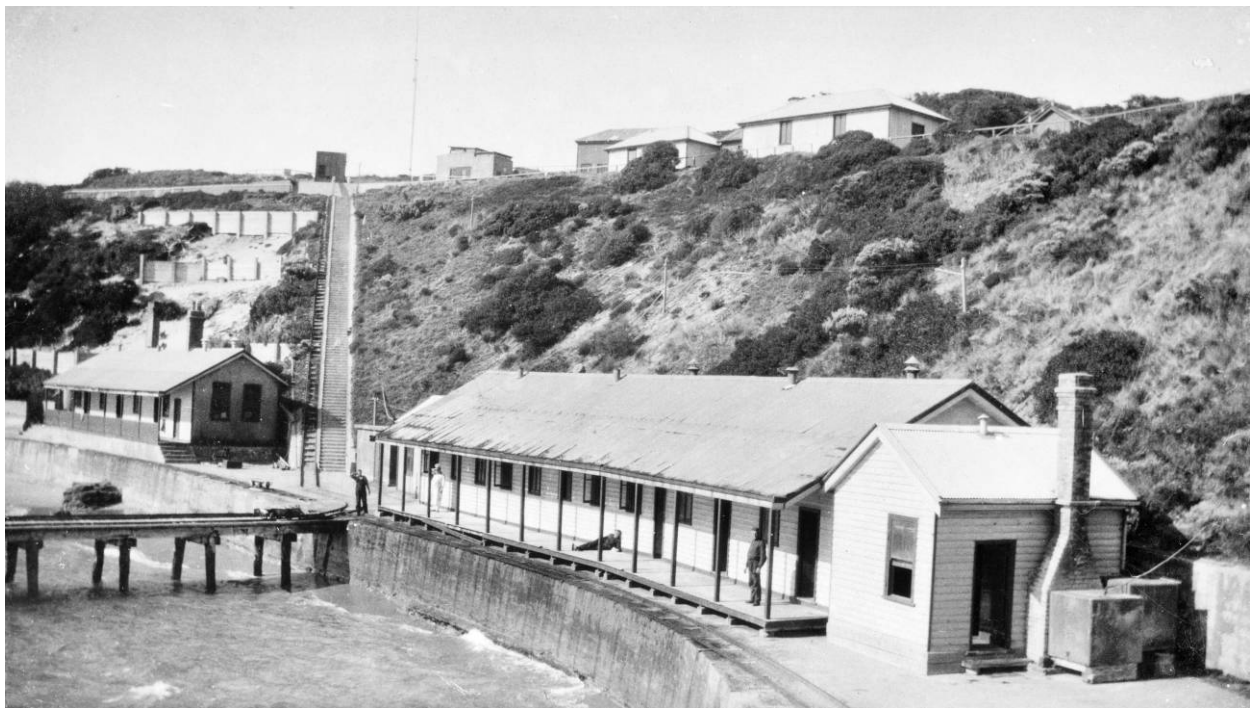
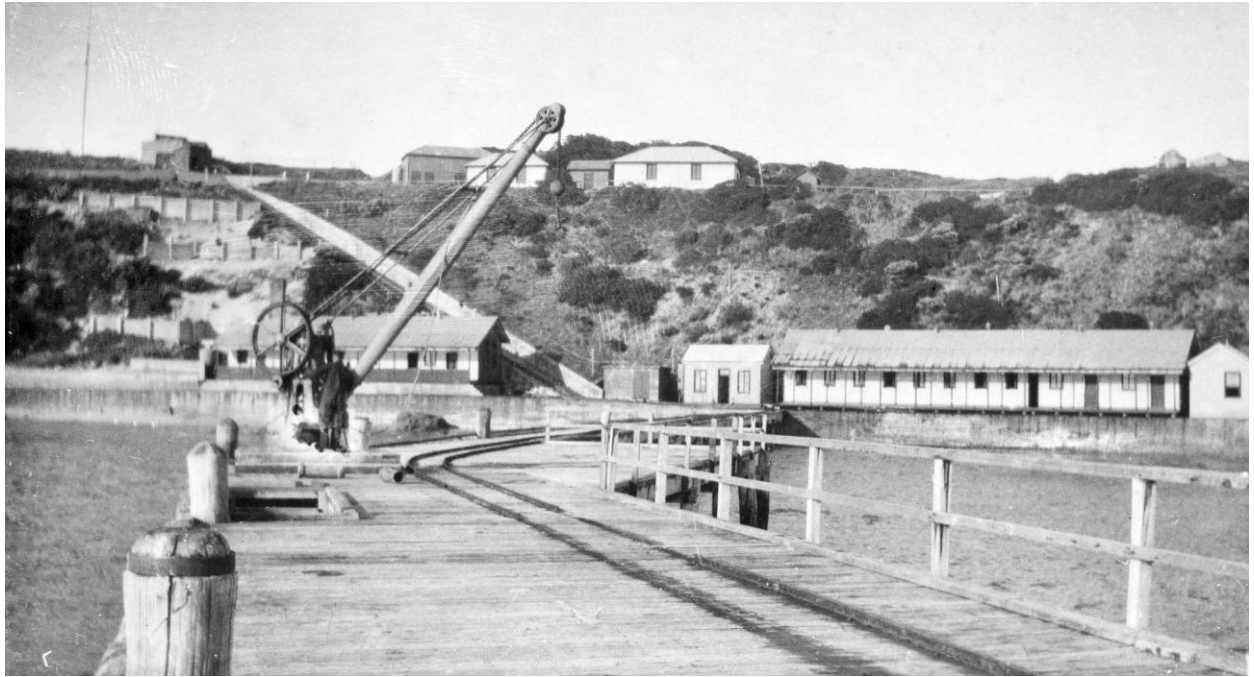
**the slurs of those  
Who, fighting not themselves,  
don't hesitate  
To brand as cowards those men who chose  
To serve Australia.<sup>43</sup>**

To be kept at home to guard Australia's ports laid the garrison artillerymen and engineers open to accusations of cowardice. The writer found it necessary to assert that the gunners and engineers on garrison duty were not afraid to go to war, but that

**It hurts That many seem to think we're here only To decorate Australia.<sup>44</sup>**

However, in both World War 1 and World War II, the Nepean Fort was a training ground for engineers and gunners who were subsequently sent overseas.

The pages of the newspaper reveal some of the limitations of the posting at Nepean. The pastimes of the men included swimming, fishing and billiards. The shortage of females at local dances was a constant complaint. Two enterprising men walked fifteen miles to Dromana to a dance, only to find that "there were 50 gents present and 15 females".<sup>45</sup>



*Figs. 7 & 8. Two views of the Royal Australian Engineers Barracks at Fort Nepean c.1933, seen from the end of the jetty and the engine room. (Australian War Memorial, Canberra). All the timber building in these views have since been demolished. (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, ID PO1449.061 and PO1149.060)*

### **BETWEEN THE WARS**

In the 1930s Carl Stillman was stationed at Nepean, going to Queenscliff only for weekends and mid-week sports meetings. At that time there were only five or six men living at Nepean. Their rations were brought over in a basket by boat from Queenscliff each day. If the weather was rough and the boat could not deliver the rations, the men had to go down to the Quarantine Station or Portsea for eggs and bread.<sup>46</sup> The working dress of the gunner consisted of white canvas trousers, white canvas jacket and a white hat.

For those engaged in cleaning and maintaining the guns, the challenge of appearing on Monday mornings in a clean uniform was considerable.<sup>47</sup>

## WORLD WAR II

Additional barracks at Point Nepean were built to accommodate the increased numbers of men stationed there during World War II. After the Japanese attack on the garrison at Rabaul in 1942, it was decided that the guns at Fort Pearce should be moved to Cheviot where a two-gun emplacement was built. The existing sites were believed to be too conspicuous and vulnerable to enemy dive-bombers. At Fort Nepean protective concrete shields were provided for emplacements F1 and H1, and a new Battery Observation Post built. Since the protective shields restricted the arc of fire from emplacements F1 and H1, a 14 pounder Nordenfelt gun was emplaced at Pearce to cover the Examination Anchorage.<sup>48</sup>

## FIRST SHOT

Fort Nepean is said to have fired the first British shot in World War II at an unidentified vessel approaching Port Phillip Heads. On 4 September 1939, a small Bass Strait freighter, the Woniora attempted to enter the Heads without identifying herself. A warning shot was fired from the fort.<sup>49</sup>

## CONDITIONS DURING WORLD WAR II

Reports on conditions at Nepean and Pearce during World War II referred to the low morale at the forts. Long hours were spent watching out to sea for enemy ships, often in cold and damp conditions. As Fortress Engineer G.H.Warr explained:

**It was an eye strain, a nerve strain and you did not dare doze for fear you missed something. And it was lonely.**

The barracks at Cheviot was known as Happy Valley. Warr recalled it as

**a most miserable and depressing place. The big compensation to the fortress man for hours of watch keeping and standing to... was to be able to return to 1st class accommodation. [Happy Valley] was worse than sub-standard ... It was unsewered, flies were a problem. Fly traps were in use but the stench made eating unpleasant. Drinking water was from a tank which had a kerosene film to prevent mosquitos breeding.[The huts held] six men each side in two-tiered bunks. There were no windows and the huts were dug in to the side of small hills and buried 90%... No sheets or pillows, [no] rifle racks, no place to dry wet clothes.<sup>50</sup>**

## RETREAT

At the end of World War II, the garrison at the Heads was removed and the buildings at Point Nepean were declared redundant.

Late in 1951, the Commonwealth Department of Health and the Department of the Army reached agreement for the Army to have temporary use of part of the Quarantine Station at Point Nepean for officer cadet training.<sup>51</sup>

The establishment of the Australian Defence Forces Academy in Canberra in 1986 led to the closure of the Officer Cadet School in December 1985.

The School of Army Health and then the Army Logistic Training Corps occupied the Quarantine Station site until 1998.

#### NOTE

*This chapter owes a great deal to the original research of Mr Michael Kitson. I am grateful to him and to Mr Bill Goodall for their constructive reading of the text. (Louise Honman, 1990)*

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 G. Serle. The Rush to be Rich. (Melbourne, 1971), p.202; Sentinel (Queenscliff) 27 July 1889.
- 2 J. Tate A History of Fort Queenscliff in the Context of Port Phillip Defences. (Queenscliff, 1982) pp.1-14.
- 3 J.M. Templeton. 'History of the Victorian Defence Force, Part I'. United Service Institution of Victoria Journal , 3, 4, September 1894, pp.3-31; Serle, The Golden Age, p.161.
- 4 31 December 1853.
- 5 T.Millar 'History of the Defence Forces of the Port Phillip District, Colony of Victoria, 1836-1900'. (M.A. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1957).
- 6 Defences of the Colony: Report of Captain Scratchley, R E.(Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1860, Vol.2, No.2).
- 7 Defences: Preliminary Report, 1977 (Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1877 Vol 2, No.46).
- 8 Major-General E. Harding Steward, Confidential memorandum, November 1884,pp. 1, 16, in Australian Archives, Brighton. MP. 106 1884-1/2/1/1.) quoted by Winty Calder Australian Aldershot (Melbourne 1987), p.iv.
- 9 Tate p. 10.
- 10 Argus 8 February 1883.
- 11 Serle, The Rush to be Rich, p.202.
- 12 Tate p. 17; M. Kitson "Australia: the South Channel Defences at Port Phillip: Factors in the Design, 1876-1909", Fort, 15, 1987, pp.105-134.
- 13 Quoted by Tate, p.5.
- 14 Sanatory Station Annual report 1876; Australian Archives CRS B3712 Folder 14, Details of Framing for Jetty for Defence Purposes, Point Nepean 2/11/1878.

- 15 Victorian Year Book 1880-81 p.12 and Reserve Branch Files Summary of Works at Point Nepean; Australian Archives B.3712 Folder 14; Contracts Reserve Branch Files. Summary of works. see also PWD Contracts 81.2/125.
- 16 PWD Contract 82.3/39 from Reserve Branch File Summary of Works.
- 17 PWD Contract 1884.5.
- 18 cited by Kitson, 'The Defence of South Channel, Port Phillip, Victoria, 1876-1906', 1985. (Manuscript in the possession of the Author).
- 19 Reserve Branch Files and PWD Contract 87.8/42; PWD Contract 88.9 and 89.90/112
- 20 The Hydro-pneumatic "disappearing" mounting was developed at Sir William Armstrong's Elswick Works in Britain. M. Kitson Notes for Guides : Port Phillip Defences, South Channel Fort (Melbourne, 1987) 4.8.
- Return of Heavy BL Guns on Military Charge in the Colony of Victoria, 1891 (Australian Archives, A.C.T. CRS A1194 Item 45.30).
- 21 R. Hyslop. 'War Scares in Australia in the Nineteenth Century', Victorian Historical Journal, 47, 1976, pp 23-44.
- 22 Age 2 July 1888; Argus 2 July 1888.
- 23 2 July 1888.
- 24 Argus, 5 July 1888.
- 25 R. Harding 'History of Guns'. (Australian Archives, A.C.T. CRS A 1194 Item 45.30.27790).
- 26 Sentinel 27 July 1889. It is believed that further shots were fired during World War II (personal communication, Mr Bill Goodall).
- 27 Problems of Great Britain. (London, 1890), p.649 cited by Kitson, 'Australia: the South Channel Defences at Port Phillip', p.105.
- 28 M. Kitson Notes for Guides, 4.8.
- 29 Ibid, 4.11.
- 30 9 Feb 1889.
- 31 G. Vazenry 'Military Forces of Victoria, 1857-1967', pp 15-45.
- 32 Kitson, Notes for Guides, 5.8.
- 33 Argus 2 July 1888
- 33 Tate, p.47.
- 35 Templeton p.26; @@ 18 April 1881; Age 16 April 1881.
- 36 Templeton p. 26; Age 18 April 1881; Argus 18 April 1881.
- 37 e.g. Australasian 18 April 1903
- 38 Serle John Monash (Melbourne, 1982), p.64.
- 39 Ibid p. 169.
- 40 A.M. Robertson War in Port Phillip. (Sorrento, 1968).
- 41 Tate p. 64.
- 42 E. Scott Australia During the War (Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, vol . XI) (Sydney, 1936) p. 36-7; Robertson, p.3.
- 43 Fort Critic 10 July 1916.

- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Fort Critic 17 June 1916.
- 46 Tate p.118.
- 47 Tate P.120.
- 48 Proposed Point Nepean National Park Concept Plan. (Melbourne, 1987); Fort Record Book 31 July 1944 Preface.
- 49 Robertson p.4.
- 50 G.H.Warr 'Notes on Point Nepean' (Manuscript in the possession of the Nepean Historical Society).
- 51 Welch, Hell to Health, p.85.