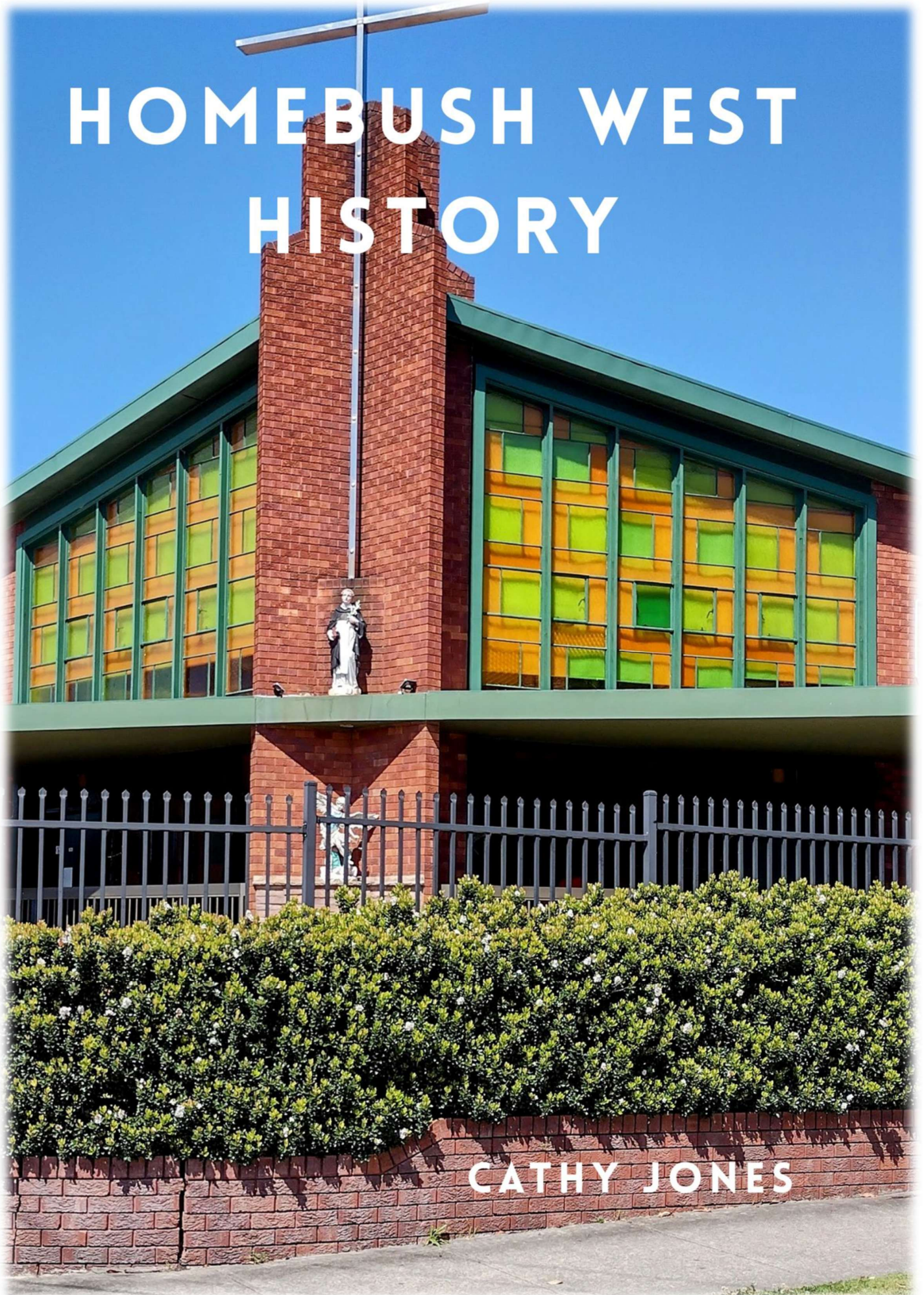


HOMEBUSH WEST HISTORY



CATHY JONES

This publication is entitled *Homebush West History* and was written by Cathy Jones.

This first edition was published in 2026.

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Cover image: Photograph of St Dominic's Catholic Church, The Crescent, Homebush West. Photograph is dated 2024 and taken by Cathy Jones.

Introduction

The suburb of Homebush West (or Flemington) is located within the traditional lands of the Wangal people, part of the Eora Nation. For thousands of years the Wangal people lived on and cared for this place, drawing on the waterways, forests and grasslands of the district for food, travel and cultural life. This history long predates the area's later colonial settlement and suburban growth, and it remains present today through the continuing connection, knowledge and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The suburb of Homebush West (south of the railway line) is historically known as the suburb of Flemington. Flemington Railway Station mainly services this suburb. The name is derived from John Fleming, who received a large grant in 1806 on which the land on both sides of the railway station is located. The suburb was renamed Strathfield West in 1971, though this name was not widely used. In 1992, the Geographical Names Board adopted the suburb name Homebush West, though many locals still call the suburb Flemington or more affectionately, 'Flemo'.

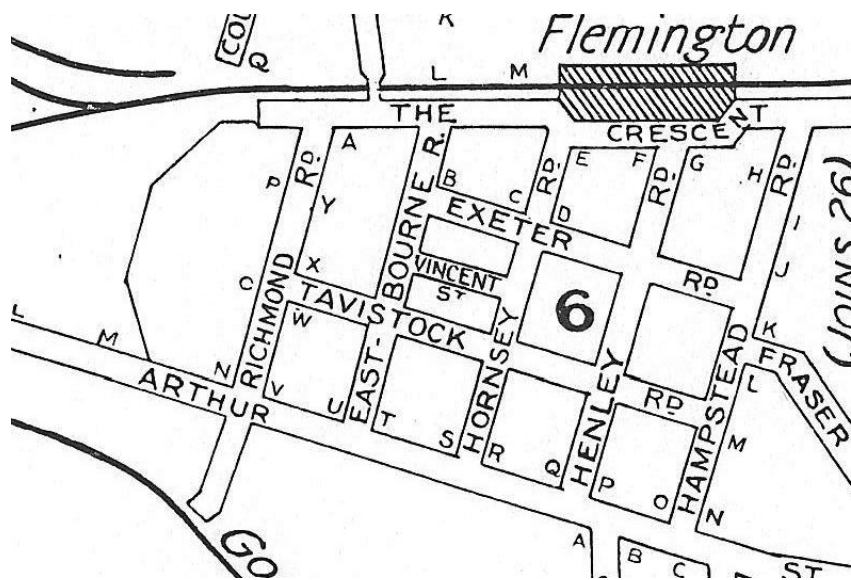


Image 1 Street Map of Flemington 1930. Premier Street Directory of Sydney and Suburbs, H E C Robinson Ltd

The principal landmark within this area is the Flemington Railway Station, which has provided the focus for much of the surrounding development, both as a source of transport and as the location of the Flemington Stock Saleyards (often also referred to as Homebush Saleyards), which was replaced from 1975 by the Sydney Produce Markets.

The land on the southern side of the railway is primarily residential with a small shopping centre. A school, community centre, long day care centre, community centre and several churches and places of worship are located in this part of the suburb of Homebush West. Within the residential areas there are several important features such as the grid style street layout, avenues of historic *Brush Box* street tree plantings, parks and gardens featuring

various memorials dedicated by residents and heritage items representing stages of the area's historical development.

Melville Reserve is a major area of open space which is connected to the larger Airey Park. Smaller parks with playgrounds are also featured in Homebush West including Henley Reserve on Hampstead Road and Tavistock Reserve on Eastbourne Road.

Most of the Homebush West area is built on the 1806 Crown Land Grant of John Fleming which measured 201 acres. Fleming was apparently a private in the NSW Corps¹, but little else is known about him or the period he owned this land.

Fleming's land grant, using current streets as place markers, was bounded at Arthur Street (south) and Parramatta Road (north). It adjoined the 1841 Joseph Hyde Potts grant (at its eastern boundary) and the 1806 Samuel Thorley grant (west). The area of Fleming's land grant was bisected horizontally when the railway line was built.

A smaller area of the current suburb of Homebush West is located on the Samuel Thorley grant and part of the Thomas Dunn grant. This area is located west of Marlborough Road, which includes Centenary Park, Courallie, Telopea and Mandemar Streets, an industrial business park with its western boundary the Pippita rail line. Most of the residential area was subdivided in the 1920s as the Mandemar Estate.

A small part of Homebush West is located north of Parramatta Road and includes streets such as Welfare Street, Flemington Road and the Wentworth Hotel. This area is located on the Wentworth Estate near its southern boundary.

This article is focused on the 19th century area of Flemington, located south of the railway, but will be revised in future to include the other sections of Homebush West.

¹ Parkinson, Liz (1989), p109

Early Settlement

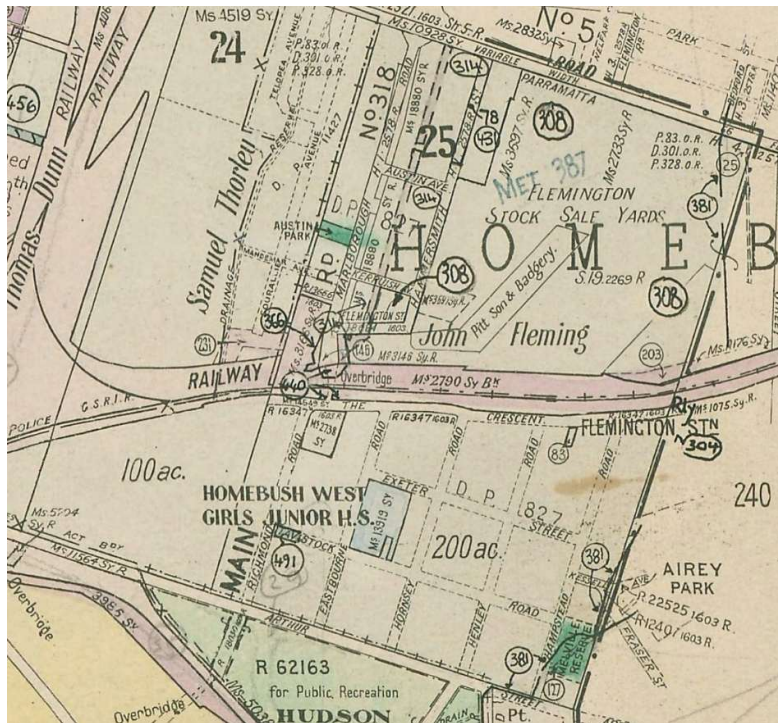


Image 2 Portion of Parish Map of Liberty Plains, County of Cumberland, dated c.1971. NSW Lands Registry.

There is little evidence of activity on the Fleming land grant prior to the subdivision in 1881, except for the acquisition of part of Fleming's land for the building of the western rail line from Sydney to Parramatta, which opened in 1855. Ownership of Fleming's grant was acquired by James Underwood in 1819².

James Underwood was the son-in-law of Edward Powell, an early land grantee in the Strathfield-Homebush district, who acquired significant land holdings in several areas of Sydney before his death in 1844. The NSW Parliament passed *Underwood's Estate Act Amendment Act* (1874) which amended the earlier *Underwood's Estate Act* (1873). The legislation concerned the administration and appointment of trustees to sell land and management the estates of the late James Underwood. The Trustees of the Underwood Estate appointed in 1874 to distribute the Flemington estate included William George Pennington, William Mackenzie Snr, Robert John King, James Clegg Taylor and Charles Wye Weekes³.

The Fleming land north of the rail line was acquired for Saleyards which opened on 1 November 1882 at Flemington. The Flemington Railway Station, as two platforms with a waiting shed and goods office, opened in 1884, mainly to support the operations of the

² Primary Application 4693

³ Certificate of Title volume 532 folio 196

Cattle and Sheep Saleyards, which had moved to Flemington from a location close to Homebush station. The Saleyards were owned by the City of Sydney Council.

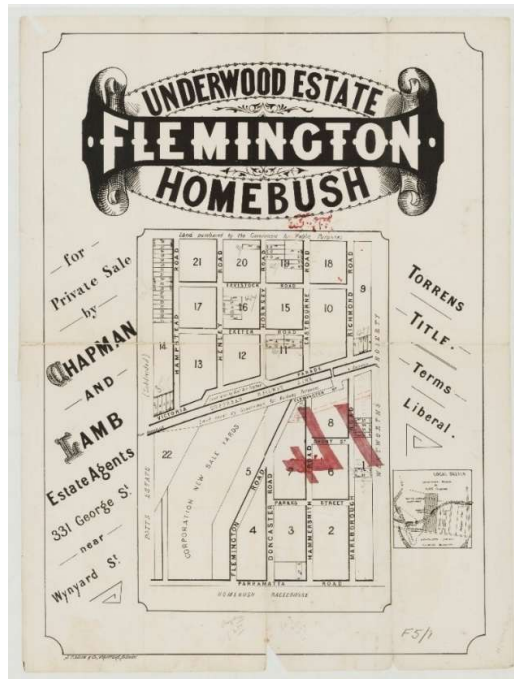


Image 3 001 - Z/SP/F5/1 - Underwood Estate - Flemington - Homebush - Parramatta Rd, Marlborough Rd, Richmond Rd, Hampstead Rd. State Library of NSW

The land south of the rail line was surveyed and a subdivision plan was prepared (deposited plan 827). This subdivision was marketed as the 'Flemington Estate' and was offered for sale at auction. The layout of the subdivision was in a 'grid style' and the street names named after places in England eg Hampstead Road, Henley Road, Exeter Road, Tavistock Street and Eastbourne Road. Victoria Parade, which runs alongside the railway, was later renamed The Crescent.

Local Government

In October 1891, 28 freeholders in Flemington petitioned the Governor of NSW to annexe the unincorporated area of Flemington to Strathfield Municipality. This action was supported by Strathfield Council. It has been suggested that Council considered that by annexing the area into the Strathfield Municipality, they would have more power to regulate noxious trades operating in Flemington⁴. The area of Flemington (203 acres) was incorporated into the Municipality of Strathfield on 16 February 1892⁵. The area described

⁴ Jones (1985), Oasis in the West

⁵ NSW Government Gazette (20 February 1892), p1458

as Flemington also included land on Strathfield's western boundary which extended as far as Liverpool Road but was unoccupied.

By 1892, Strathfield Council had a population of at least 1000 people, which was the minimum requirement for dividing a municipality into wards. A petition from 81 people was made to establish three wards: Strathfield, Homebush and Flemington in 1892, which was approved through proclamation⁶. The three wards were established, with equal representations of three Aldermen elected from each ward, though the population of Flemington was significantly smaller than the other wards. The ward system was abolished in 1916 and the Strathfield Municipality reverted to one ward for future elections. The Aldermen who were elected at Council ordinary or by-elections between 1893 to 1916 to represent the Flemington Ward included Hugh Gordon, Albert Allen, George Maiden Jnr, William Evans Richards, George Reid, Walter Weston Davies, John Price, William Pilgrim, John Edwin Andrews and Harrie Badgery.

Despite achieving political representation on Strathfield Council of three Aldermen, the actual number of residents of Flemington was sparse. The first published Sands Directory including Flemington streets in the Strathfield Council area was in 1895. According to this directory, there were two households in Eastbourne Road including Richard Harrington and George Maiden jnr, auctioneer; no households in Tavistock Road; four households in Henley Road; three households in Hornsey Road; three households in Victoria Parade and six households in Hampstead Road.

Housing and suburban development

Though there was some housing built in the late 19th century such as the heritage listed Victorian style cottage 'Brooklyn' 1 Hornsey Road, however most of the residential development in Flemington occurred in the early 20th century, mainly in the form of single storey timber styled cottages. Following Strathfield Council's adoption of a residential proclamation in 1920, all buildings henceforth were required to be built in brick materials and timber houses were prohibited.

Despite changes in urban form, the area has retained examples of historic development from the 19th century and early 20th century with representative examples of residential, ecclesiastical and commercial buildings.

⁶ Government Gazette NSW (19 February 1892), p1398



Image 4 'Manx Cottage'1 Eastbourne Avenue, built 1891. Photo: Cathy Jones 2024

After much community petitioning to build a school in Flemington, the NSW Government finally agreed. On 26 December 1911, the Sydney Morning Herald reported:

*FLEMINGTON. A new school is being built on a new site. The building contains an assembly hall 49ft X 24ft, four classrooms, with a total accommodation for 200 children, headmistress's room, room for teacher's staff, two bathrooms etc. It is a brick structure, and very similar to, that recently erected at Haberfield. New sanitary conveniences, two weather sheds, lavatories, fencing and tar-paving to portions of the ground are also provided for. The work is in hand by day labour, and is estimated to cost £2600.*⁷

The Minister for Public Instruction A C Carmichael opened the Flemington Public School in 1912 in Exeter Street. This school was renamed Homebush West Public School in 1947. It operated as a home science school for girls from 1953 to 1974⁸.

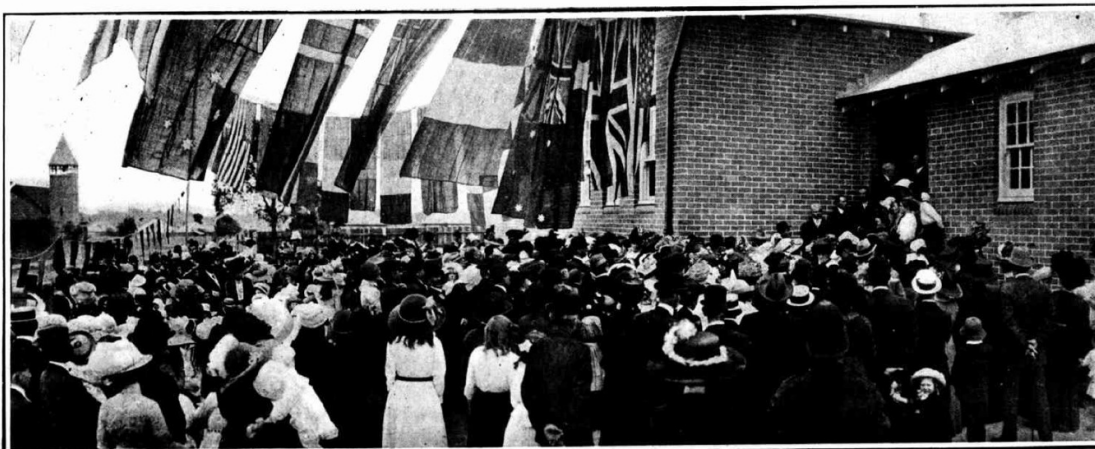


Image 5 1912 Opening of Flemington School. Australian Town and Country Journal.

Image 1

⁷ "Buildings and Works. Progress of the Trade." (26 December 1911) Sydney Morning Herald, p6.

⁸ Macritchie, J (2024), Homebush West Public School

The Homebush West area has reasonably consistent avenues of mature growth street trees, primarily *Brush Box* species, planted c.1920s.

In Flemington, two memorials in Melville Reserve, Homebush West, were erected by local residents. The sandstone memorial gates bear the inscription: *'These gates were erected by the citizens of Flemington in honour of those who enlisted in the Great War 1914-1918.'* Nearby, a small bridge across Saleyards Creek carries a companion plaque dedicated to those who fell in the war. The site is heritage listed by Strathfield Council.

By c.1896, a few small grocery shops were operating on Henley Road, south of Flemington Station. This shopping centre expanded to include shops on The Crescent (formerly Victoria Crescent) and Henley Road in the early 1900s. Some of the two storey shop buildings facing Henley Road and The Crescent were built in the 1920s. Shops listed in directories on The Crescent in the 1930s included a bakery, general store, newsagent, bootmaker, fruit shop, confectionery, butcher, medical practitioner, post office and telegraph office. The shopping centre is linked via footbridge access (across the railway station) to Sydney Markets.

Densification and changing communities

In the 1980s and 1990s, sites on Henley Road between The Crescent and Exeter Street were demolished and redeveloped as three storey mixed commercial and residential developments containing shops and offices. From the late 1980s, the shopping centre strongly featured Asian influenced businesses particularly food stores and restaurants.

The NSW Government commenced acquisition of vacant sites in the Sydney metropolitan area for housing to address post-WWII shortages. A large site on the corner of 1 Hampstead Road and The Crescent was acquired by the Department of Public Works in 1949, though the three two storey unit developments were not built until mid-1950s. The Housing Commission acquired three sites at 19-23 Hampstead Road Homebush in 1971 building multi-unit housing developments⁹

Until the 1960s, Homebush West had a largely Anglo-Celtic population with small but growing post-war European communities. Orthodox churches were built in or close to Homebush West including St Sava's Serbian Orthodox Church (1954) in Hampstead Road and the Ukrainian Church in Arthur Street (1957), which serviced a small local population but due their advantageous location near rail and major roads, also attracted wider regional communities. The Hungarian Scout Hall was built in 1968 in Melville Reserve, which has since been demolished and replaced with the Homebush West Community

⁹ NSW Land Registry, v.3617 folios 161,162, 163

Centre. With increasing numbers of migrants of Catholic faith from central European, a new St Dominic's Catholic Church, The Crescent, Flemington was built in 1956, replacing the smaller church built in 1920. St Dominic's Primary School was founded in 1923 by the Sisters of St Joseph from the Strathfield parish but closed in 2006.

In 1976, Strathfield Council built a childcare centre in Melville Reserve, Hampstead Road, Homebush West. The centre was named 'Kurralee', an Aboriginal name meaning 'where children play'.¹⁰ The name was suggested by Rev. Thornton of the Sydney Rescue Society (who conducted the centre) and Alderman Helen L'Orange and was formally adopted by Council resolution¹¹.

Following the dismantling of the White Australia Policy in the 1970s, migration patterns shifted towards Asia, with significant communities settling in the Strathfield LGA from China, South Korea, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, India and, more recently, Nepal. The Homebush West area is highly multicultural, with 72% of its local population (in the area south of Flemington Rail Station) born overseas (2021 Census). The main ancestries of this area of Homebush West residents are Indian, Nepalese, Chinese, Tamil and English, while there are significant populations born in India (20%), Nepal (14%), China (13%), Sri Lanka (4%) and Vietnam (3%). To support Hindu faith, the Sri Karphaga Vinayakar Hindu Temple, 123 The Crescent Homebush West opened in 2019.

In the early 1960s, streets close to Flemington Rail Station were rezoned to permit unit development, most were two bedroom units in 2-4 storey multi unit developments¹². The streets closer to Arthur Street retained its low density zoning, however with the adoption of the Housing Strategy in the late 1990s, additional areas of Homebush West were rezoned for multi-unit development in the form of units, villas and townhouses. As a direct result of the rezoning, the local population and the number of unit dwellings in Homebush West dramatically increased.

The population of Homebush West (south of the railway) has almost doubled since 2001 to 2021, rising from 2198 to 4134 people. In 2001, 20% of dwellings were houses, which has now declined to 5.5% at the 2021 census. 94% of all dwellings are multi-unit housing, compared to 85% in 2001¹³.

¹⁰ Childcare centre ready for action (September 29, 1976), *Western Suburbs Courier*, p3

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² Strathfield Council Building Register

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Regional Population Growth, Australia (3218.0). Compiled and presented by .id (informed decisions)

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