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David Nichols, Robert Freestone and Yvette Putra

***Frank Heath: transitions of an architect
planner from the 1930s to the 1960s***

ON 26 MARCH 1947, FROM HIS OFFICE in Temple Court on Collins Street in Melbourne, forty- year-old Frank Norman Heath summarised his professional career to date in four pages of impressive typescript.¹ He was, he wrote, a graduate of the School of Architecture at the University of Melbourne; a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Royal Australian Institute of Architects; a member of the Town Planning Institute of London, and had latterly been elected a member of the American Society of Landscape Architects. ‘Over the past ten to twelve years’, he added, ‘I have been actively associated with most developments in town and regional planning in this country and am generally recognised by those in touch with town planning matters as having had more experience in this work than any other person in Australia.’

Heath then duly recorded his achievements. Not only had he prepared plans for the future development of ‘the Metropolis of Melbourne’ but also for six regional Victorian cities and the suburbs of South Melbourne and Ringwood, as well as zoning plans for still more Melbourne suburbs: Richmond, Coburg, Heidelberg, Preston, Braybrook ‘and many others’. ‘In 1937’, he continued, ‘I was a prize-winner in an Australian-wide competition conducted by the Housing Commission of Victoria for designs for the layout of Housing Units and Estate Development at Fishermens Bend’. This had been the big break in his career.² The prize brought an invitation to serve on the Housing Commission’s Architects Panel and since then he had ‘been engaged on a large amount of Estate Planning involving, in some cases, the layout of areas of over one thousand acres in various forms of ‘Neighbourhood Unit’ development’. At the time he was writing he was engaged in preparing a Regional Plan for the Latrobe Valley: ‘This is, I believe, the first actual detailed regional planning scheme which has been carried out in Australia’. His involvement in planning and design extended into part-time lecturing at the University of Melbourne and active engagements with the Town and Country Planning Association of Victoria, the Land Values Research Panel, and the Victorian Playgrounds Association.

Yet in detailing only his work in planning and in public advocacy, Heath was still understating the extent of his operations. His firm was involved in design of public buildings large and small – including an expanding network of bush nursing hospitals across Victoria – in private house plans, industrial buildings and banks. That he was writing this account to apply for the position of Geelong’s first town planner may have caused him to tailor it thus, but in doing so he arguably minimised some of the angles on a highly successful and individualistic practice, now largely forgotten.

This study of Frank Heath seeks to place this important and under-examined figure in his context both globally and locally, revealing his contribution as an

archetypal example of the mid-century modernist architect-planner. It draws on a hitherto unexamined wealth of personal and corporate papers held within the Blyth and Josephine Johnson collection at the State Library of Victoria. The major transition evident in Heath's career is from the concentration in the 1940s and 1950s on planning, through to architectural work in the 1960s whilst retaining throughout a focus on public amenity provision.

'I'm glad I finally decided to be an architect'

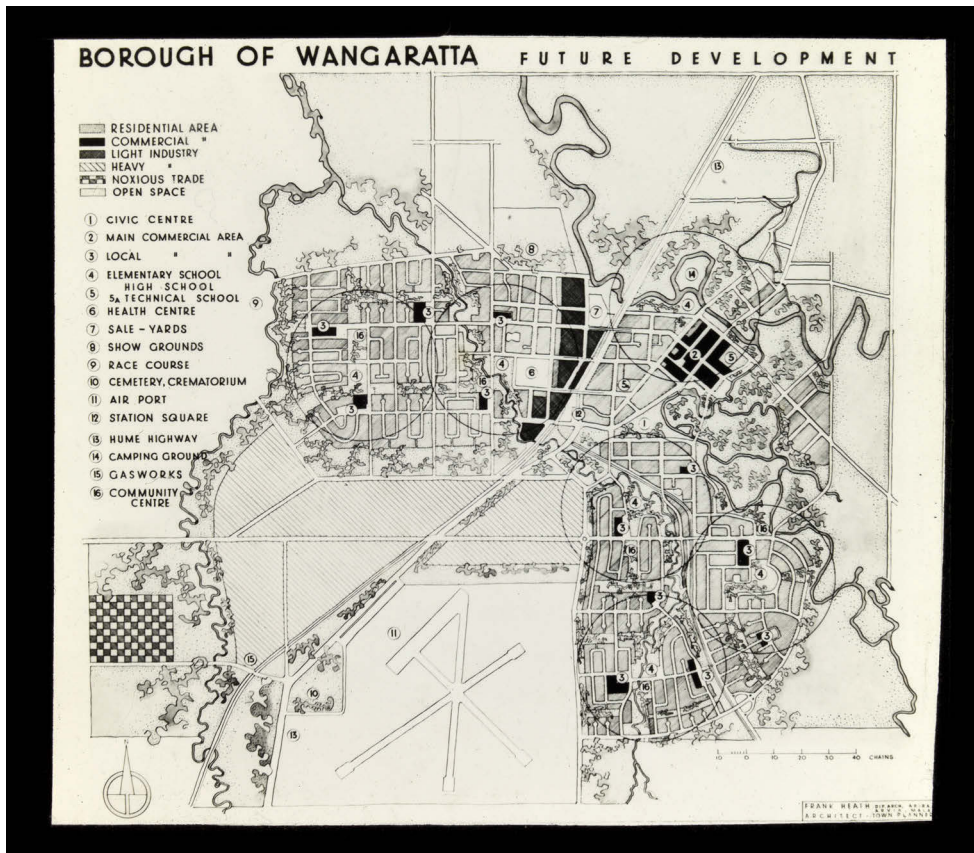
Frank Heath – from press reports good-natured and self-effacing – does not have a well-recorded private life. His father Charles was an architect whose two best known works are still extant in Melbourne's northern suburbs. These are the distinctively domed Coburg Town Hall and the new Melbourne General Cemetery, placed in the outer suburb of Fawkner to retroactively provide purpose for a failed railway line. Here beauty was derived through variety and a 'different treatment of the various avenues' giving 'views of varying character.'³ Charles became the cemetery's caretaker and lived on site in a self-designed 'attic-storey house of the Edwardian era . . . in its own private gardens.'⁴ Frank Heath's early life growing up in the expanding Fawkner cemetery in the midst of an otherwise sparsely populated outer suburb of Melbourne seemingly failed to give him a depressive or morbid bent (nor, apparently, did childhood polio). He would later design items for the cemetery, and indeed entertained a lifelong interest in cemetery design and modes of disposal of the dead.

'At school', he would later say, 'I was a chemistry fiend . . . then I wanted to be an engineer. I'm glad I finally decided to be an architect.'⁵ He studied at the University of Melbourne in the late 1920s, and his notebooks and well-received essays – retained in pristine condition in his archives – show a strong interest in the design aesthetic of ancient Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Rome. Other of his student papers include two 'Geological Field Books' from 1929, providing a record of ramblings through areas between the university and his home turf, such as Coburg and Royal Park, perhaps indicating the beginnings of his interest in site survey and topography. Following graduation as an architect in 1932, Heath studied art at the newly-opened George Bell–Arnold Shore studios.⁶

Entering the workforce as a young practitioner at the onset of the Great Depression, he may well have been short of work. There is no direct evidence of his finding work via connections from his father, and the two do not appear to have worked together in any capacity. But Charles did spend the last ten years of his life in a house in Eltham designed by his son.

1932–39 and the 'big break'

We know little of Heath's early commissions. He did team up with sculptor Orlando Dutton to produce a competition entry for a memorial statue to King George V: the proposal gained some notice, but was unsuccessful.⁷ In 1934 his passions for the modern



Frank Heath, *Borough of Wangaratta Future Development*, [c. 194-]. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria [H2011/35/41]

cemetery, filtered through his Fawcner experience, was revealed in what some newspapers referred to as a 'startling outburst' condemning 'pretentious' monuments in Melbourne's cemeteries. He called for design standards to limit the 'heterogeneous mass of hideous and glaring white marble monstrosities'.⁸

However, it was not until the late 1930s that Heath began to gain a profile in Melbourne – not for his architecture but for his advocacy of town planning. In 1936 he became honorary secretary to the Victorian Town Planning Association (later the Town and Country Planning Association) founded by James Barrett in 1914. He retained the position for 15 years. His frequent critiques of current practice became a regular feature in news items at a time when 'town planning' as a discipline was still sufficiently novel that popular discourse often required an explanation of its intent and activities. His aspirations were frequently large-scale and forward-looking: a £3 million scheme

for slum clearance;⁹ arguing for a central planning authority;¹⁰ a new airport between Footscray and the Coode Canal;¹¹ and a new civic centre on the site of the ‘obsolete’ (now World Heritage listed) Exhibition Building in Carlton.¹²

In May 1939 Heath was awarded fourth prize for housing design in a competition held by the Housing Commission of Victoria (HCV). More important even than the prize itself was the subsequent invitation to join the Architects’ Panel of the HCV. Though the winners had been Heath, Arthur Leith, Commonwealth public servant C. Jackson and the Sydney-based Eric Andrew, the latter two either could not accept or were considered unsuitable for the position and were replaced by local architects Best Overend and John Scarborough. This entry into the HCV’s operations was to prove invaluable for Heath. His practice would be involved with the design of economical ‘small’ homes into the 1960s. But prestige and connections undoubtedly helped in other ways, particularly in advancing his reputation as a planning expert.

Practical Planner in the 1940s

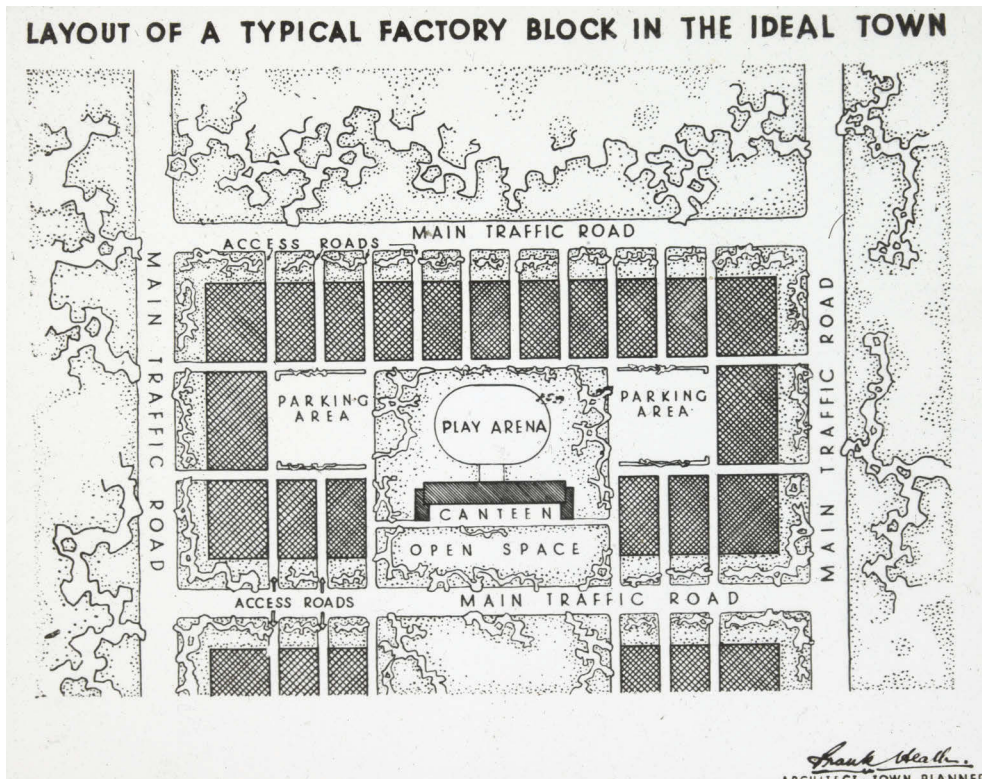
In 1941 the newly created borough of Swan Hill invited Heath to prepare a town expansion plan in response to wartime decentralisation. His association with Arthur Leith, designer of the recently-opened Swan Hill Town Hall, and the HCV’s country architect, John Buchan, may have helped secure this project. In 1943, addressing a meeting regarding ‘Swan Hill’s endeavour to bring order out of chaos’, Heath appears to speak of himself in the third person in suggesting that:

Swan Hill sought the aid of a qualified town planner, who has since laid out a plan which will certainly make Swan Hill an attractive town as the suggested improvements are brought into effect. This will be the first planned town in Australia.¹³

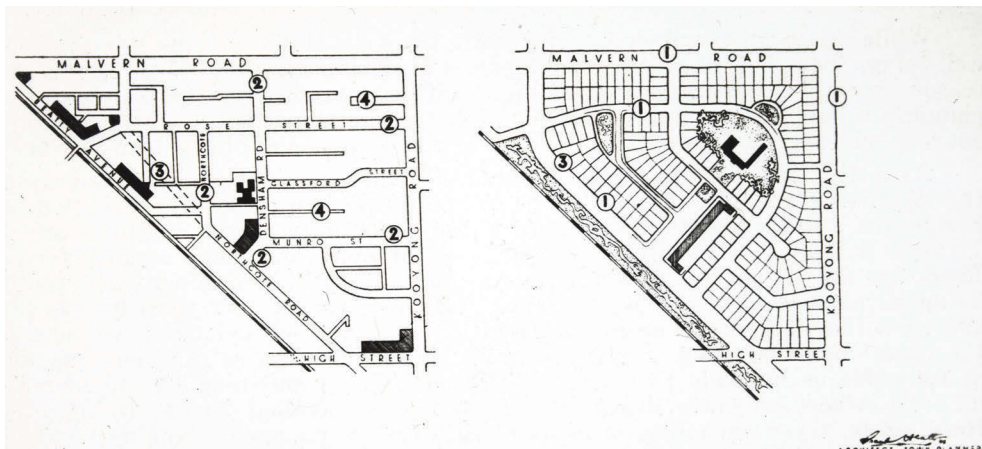
This project was one of several collaborations with the Czech immigrant planner-architect Ernest Fooks, who was making a name for himself at the same time.¹⁴ Swan Hill was undoubtedly one of the most progressive rural planning projects of the era but it was far from the nation’s ‘first planned town’.¹⁵ Yet its design basis in neighbourhood unit planning, civic groups, park systems, green belts, and land use zoning made it an exemplar of contemporary community planning ideals. A similar formula is applied to later redevelopment-extension schemes for Wangaratta (c. 1944), Horsham (c. 1944), Ballarat (1945), Maffra (1945) and Seymour (1946).

Heath’s plans were visually striking, presented attractively and often – presumably at the behest of commissioning authorities – included designs for new civic buildings and precincts. The explanatory text often recycles the same generic description and ‘theoretical’ grounding – quoting, for instance, renowned international commentators such as Jose Luis Sert or Lewis Mumford.¹⁶ His plan for Seymour and the outer Melbourne suburb of Ringwood both used the same argument that each be developed ‘with all the characteristics of the ideal Garden City’:

The true Garden City comprises a town properly planned making provision for ideal conditions as far as possible for living, working, recreation and transport.



Frank Heath, *Layout of a Typical Factory Block in the Ideal Town* [c. 193-]. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria [H2011.35/208]



Frank Heath, *Bad and Good Land Subdivision* [Armadale, Vic., c. 194-]. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria [H2011.35/210]

Residential areas are so placed in relation to community facilities, parks and shopping areas, and the industrial sections of the town, – and all placed in proper relation to each other with a rural belt surrounding the town, – so as to obtain the maximum degree of health and happiness for everyone within the town.¹⁷

Heath would then typically highlight key features, routes or impediments within the individual city and then detail the application of the appropriate method for solving the problems.

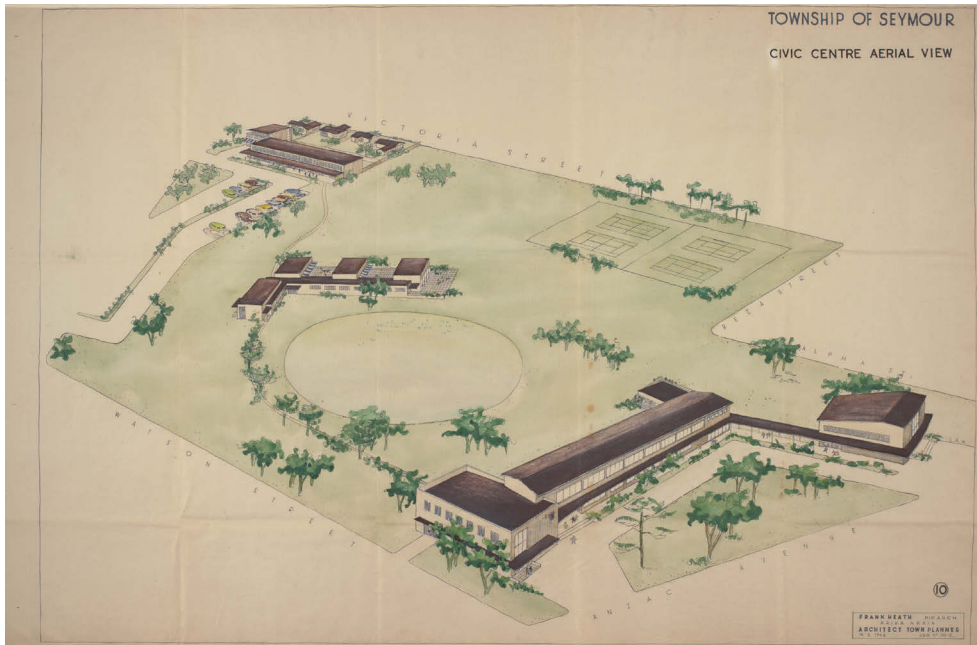
Heath's rising profile by 1943 is captured by the request from H. C. 'Nugget' Coombs, the Commonwealth Director of Post-War Reconstruction, that he 'formulate suitable principles and standards and frame clauses that could be used as a basis for town planning legislation to be discussed with State Government authorities.'¹⁸ Thus it was in the midst of planning various extensions for Victorian towns in the name of decentralisation that Heath produced a 'Report upon Town Planning' (August 1944) for the Ministry. This expressed his growing experience in a new context: the possibility of an Australia wide town planning policy. It was a succinct and readable example of 'best practice' planning of the period, adapted to a perceived need within the newly industrialising Australia. Heath wrote of his belief in the 'proper distribution of population' and the delineation of the nation into manageable 'Natural Regions' that could be zoned prescriptively to accommodate in new towns the increasing population and industrial expansion.

Any site chosen for a new town must be at least of moderate quality, which will provide good foundations for building and where reasonably good gardens are possible . . . the economic value and use and the social value of the land is of equal importance. If cities are properly laid out, the area of land required for residential as well as industrial purposes would be relatively small compared with that needed for agricultural purposes.¹⁹

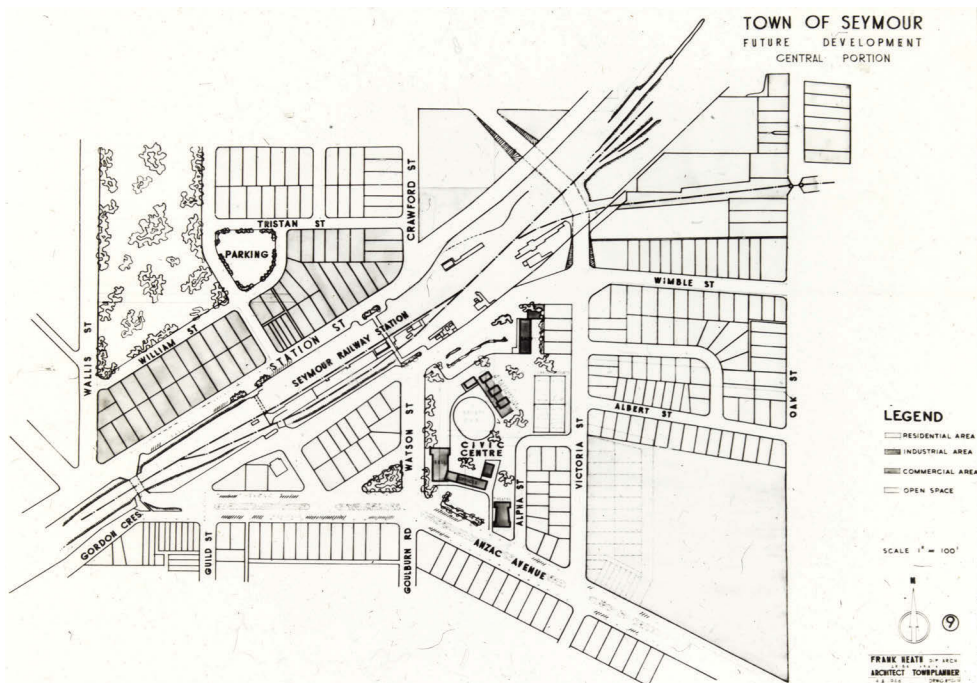
Propagandist for Planning

In the same year as the release of this confidential report, Heath teamed with two other local planning-housing advocates, Oswald Barnett and W. O. Burt, to produce a more populist treatment and expansion of their central ideas entitled *We Must Go On: a study of planned reconstruction*.²⁰ Heath's contribution to this influential volume was in large part visual: his office provided, for instance, a diagram comparing a hypothetical 'typical suburban subdivision' to a 'new neighbourhood unit' (in fact, a redrawing of 'Neighbourhood Unit 2' from the Swan Hill design) as well as hypothetical plans for metropolitan Melbourne planned on the 'green wedge' growth model.

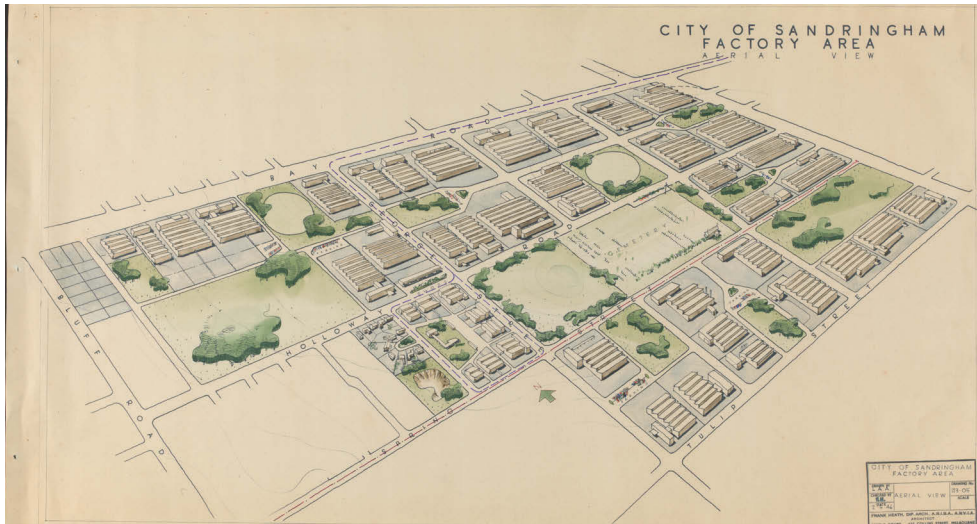
We Must Go On exemplifies the reformist tracts drawn up by town planners at the height of the reconstruction fervour that infiltrated numerous areas of public policy in the 1940s. The book directly challenged the conventional land tenure and development system in Australia; its advocacy of a Central Planning Authority (alongside a State Housing Authority) was underscored by a firm statement that 'we cannot leave the future to laissez-faire'.²¹ *We Must Go On* would quickly come to be seen as representing



Frank Heath, *Township of Seymour Civic Centre, Aerial View*. 1946. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria [H2011.35/165]



Frank Heath, *Town of Seymour Future Development*, 1946. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria [H2011.35/22]



Frank Heath, *City of Sandringham Factory Area*, 1946. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria [H2011.35]

a particularly idealistic moment in Australia's history with its ardent praise of Soviet central planning.²² Renate Howe details how at the beginning of the Cold War Barnett was persecuted as a supposed Communist 'fellow traveller' with this section of the book being used as prime evidence, despite it being credited to Heath who escaped vilification.²³ Heath's reflections in praise of Russian reconstruction cast light on his opinions on the rightful place of planning in a society. 'The ordinary citizen of Moscow or Leningrad,' he claimed, 'is able and anxious to talk about the rebuilding and development of his city'. He saw Russian town planning projects as 'positive, i.e. they are definite programmes of construction to be carried out according to a time schedule'.²⁴ In the USSR, professionals co-operated in planning schemes, new towns were built extensively across the nation, and industry relocated accordingly. Heath even directly equated his own plans for Swan Hill with the Russian 'block' and 'rayon' system, though more typically he was prone to discuss them as conforming to the ideals of the American theorist, Clarence Perry.

It was quite common after the end of the Depression to hear critiques of the inequalities of the market system in favour of more integrated governmental intervention. Heath's advocacy chimes with that of Best Overend who, in late 1942, wrote that regional and town planning 'has passed beyond the discussion stage. It is not being discussed in England – it is being practised, as in Germany, as in Russia, as in Italy and as in Japan'.²⁵ Heath and others were inspired not only by the apparent success of centrally directed hierarchical planning, but also by the seeming enthusiasm of the people for

major projects contributing to long term nation-building. He foresaw the long arm of planning dictating, for instance, the development of Swan Hill in his 1941 plan:

The old system whereby towns were allowed to grow at random with little or no measure of guidance and control by the Civic Authority is now obsolete and the expansion of our towns should be carried out according to a long range scheme.²⁶

One other event sealed Heath's reputation as a planning advocate in the 1940s. This was the *Houses and Towns to Live In* exhibition which travelled across Victoria throughout 1944.²⁷ This was a joint venture between the HCV and the Melbourne University Extension Board, and was inspired by an exhibition of the same name held in the UK by the Workers' Educational Association. The University saw it as a potential catalyst for establishment of a planning school.²⁸ Visitors were introduced not only to new ideas for domestic living but planning concepts such as the neighbourhood unit, with Heath's office constructing an impressive physical model which became a centrepiece of the exhibition. Humorous sketches were contributed by June Morton, a seventeen-year-old art student at Swinburne Technical School.²⁹ But the message was deadly serious:

The shortcomings of the present day are very real and their solution is a vital and an urgent need. A wide-spread appreciation of this need is essential in order that far-reaching action may result. Public demand will ultimately produce positive results. Planning is essential.³⁰

Heath's 1947 Tour of Europe and the USA

In 1947 Heath undertook a grand study tour of Europe and the USA over several months. His journey neatly encapsulates his planning interests and new expertise was gathered on the trip which was to impact on his later career. He departed from Melbourne's Essendon airport (bound for Sydney, the point of departure for international travellers at that time) on 28 May and he arrived in Singapore three days later. By 7 June he was finally in London which he found, despite its 'huge amount of traffic in the streets', to 'run very smoothly' and quietly which he attributed to 'the lack of trams'; Heath was an advocate of the motor bus and motor car.³⁰ On 17 June Heath attended the annual meeting of the Cremation Society in Nottingham Place; three days later he inspected a planning exhibition at the 'Housing Centre'. On 21 June he embarked on a two-week tour of Denmark and Sweden.

Back in the UK he took a special interest in the New Towns program. He notes that at the 'proposed new town of Stevenage . . . [t]he existing village which is to roughly form one Neighbourhood in the new town has not been receiving the proposals with any degree of enthusiasm'. One implication was the desirability of starting development afresh:

[This] all seems to point to the desirability of building new towns on almost open country as laid down by Ebenezer Howard, the founder of the 'Garden City' idea, upon which these new towns are based. By so doing, disturbance is less, planning is freer and more adaptable to present day needs. This, I gathered, is one of the things now realised by the sponsors of the Stevenage site.³²

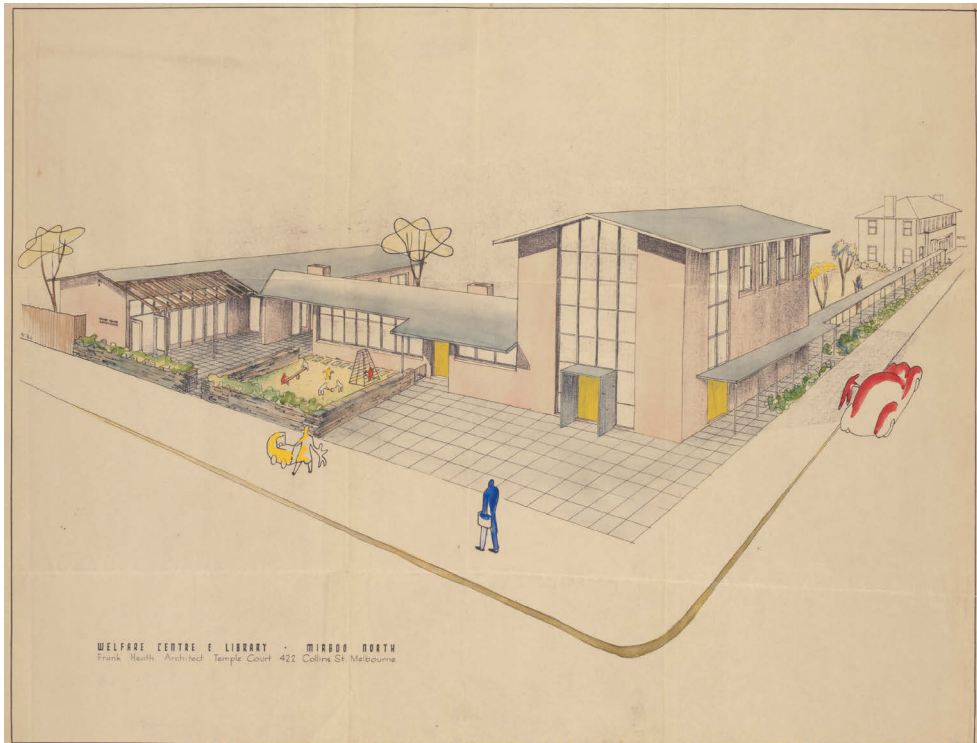
Heath's Swan Hill plan, and indeed many similar plans by his office, had used precisely the same principles as Stevenage with the existing town recast as one neighbourhood among many in an expanded 'garden city' configuration. It may be that by this time, the unwillingness of any of the local government areas which approached Heath in the early to mid-1940s to actually comprehensively adopt his recommendations was becoming clear to him.

At the end of September, Heath met with the prominent British planning advocate and educationalist, Jacqueline Tyrwhitt of the Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction. His notes record: 'Long discussion with Miss Jaquelen Tyrritt [sic] who took me to lunch. Discussed various aspects of work of [the] Association . . . and [its] educational and general program'. Heath's outlook, and approach to publicity for planning, were similar to Tyrwhitt's; not least her advocacy, following pioneer town planner Patrick Geddes whom Heath also seemed to admire, of an approach summed up in the title of her *Survey Before Plan* booklet series. More importantly for Heath's career into the 1950s was Tyrwhitt's War Office Correspondence Course in planning.³³ Heath obtained copies of Tyrwhitt's *Syllabus of a Course on Planning Practice*, which appears to have informed his own lectures at the University of Melbourne in the early 1950s.

Heath also travelled to the USA, where he visited new towns created under the aegis of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), such as Fontana Village in North Carolina.³⁴ These he saw as 'the most pleasing new small towns which I have seen – places where one would really enjoy living'. Fontana Village was a new town that had replaced a settlement inundated by construction of a new dam on the Little Tennessee River. Built initially for the dam workers, Fortuna Village was recreated as a tourist spot the year before Heath arrived. As impressed as he was with such sites, Heath wrote that 'Australia has very little to learn from American housing except in one or two isolated instances of special housing as at T.V.A.'. His observations in America would nonetheless inform his regional planning work in the Latrobe Valley soon after returning to Australia, particularly when considering problems such as the mooted relocation of the town of Morwell for the State Electricity Commission to win the coal that lay beneath it.

Heath's extensive notes on his journey were used as the basis for articles in popular and trade magazines as well as finding their way into his consultant reports directly related to Melbourne either as exemplars or to criticise local practice, such as when he wrote:

In England, there is a move taking place for the creation of a 'blue belt'. The idea is to provide for all time, a belt of coastal country around as much of England as possible for recreational and holiday purposes free from the general building development except under certain conditions conforming with the general preservation of the country-side. The time has arrived here in Victoria for some active steps to be taken to retain the beauties of our own bayside, to prevent the continued 'modernisation' under the guise of 'progress' so beloved by some of our bayside Councils.³⁵



Frank Heath, *Welfare Centre & Library, Mirboo North*, c. 1960. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria [H2011.35]

Even while abroad, Heath had used his international experience to critique his own city. He told the Melbourne *Herald* that Melburnians were ‘niggardly in [their] approach to housing and town development problems’ and ‘only heaping up difficulties for the future’ because their practice was ‘10 to 15 years behind modern thought.’³⁶

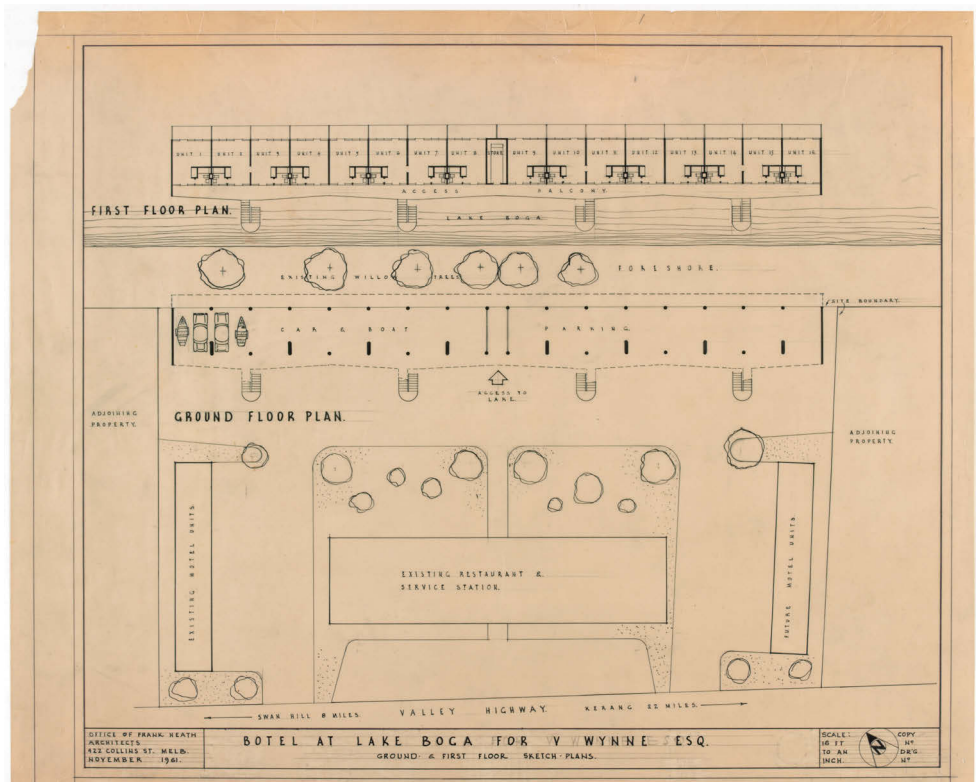
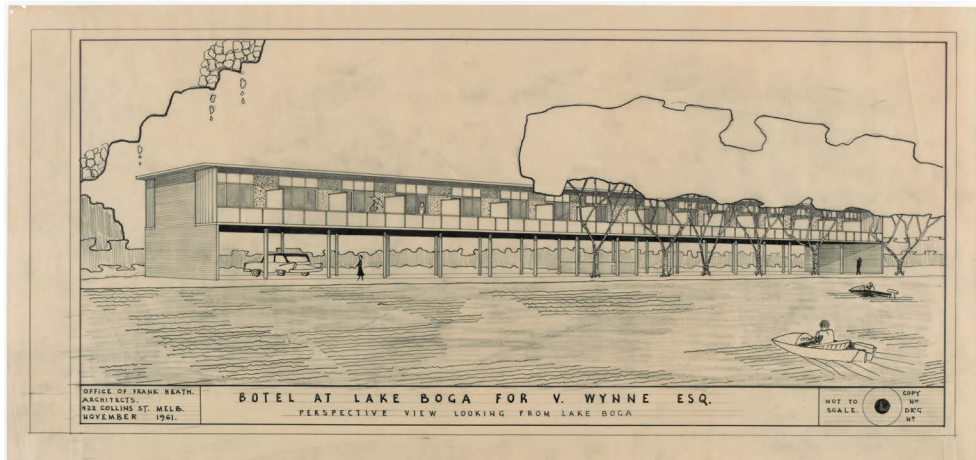
On his return, Heath found outlets for much of his writing on certain building forms. Sometimes, this came via other writers: the noted journalist Pat Jarrett quoted Heath and his colleague John Buchan in an *Australian Home Beautiful* magazine piece entitled ‘What’s wrong with our country towns?’ This utilised photographs of Dutch and Swedish sites – almost certainly supplied by Heath – alongside a sketch from his office of a model shopping centre for the Victorian regional town of Seymour.³⁷ Work which appeared under his own name might well have been targeted to prospective clients, such as three articles on Swiss hospital design which appeared in *The Hospital Magazine* in 1948-49. Heath had already commenced a long relationship with the Bush Nursing Association of Victoria beginning in 1944 with plans for additions to a facility at Edenhope in the Wimmera district.³⁸

From Planning to Architecture

A major project for Heath between 1947 and 1951 was the report he prepared with W. E. Gower, the State Electricity Commission's chief architect. Here Heath repeated much of the rhetoric of community planning espoused in *We Must Go On*.³⁹ However, after the 1940s much of the work of Heath's office's moved on from planning, which increasingly became the province of government departments. This meant a significant re-organisation of his priorities, particularly after he was unsuccessful in securing the town planner's position in Geelong. Heath ended his long tenure as honorary secretary of the Town Planning Association in 1951 (receiving the inaugural James Barrett medal for his contributions the following year)⁴⁰ but continued teaching at the University of Melbourne in its postgraduate Town and Regional Planning course until 1954.⁴¹ John Bayly remembers him in that role as 'very precise, meticulously accurate about what he did' and recalled Heath's speech as being 'most precise', with 'very crisp articulation'.⁴² Heath also served on Canberra's National Capital Planning and Development Committee between 1954 and 1957.⁴³

But his firm began to concentrate much more on individual buildings such as health and child care facilities, hotels and factories. At the beginning of the new decade Heath appears to have retreated in large part from execution of planning works under his own name to products of what was developing into a medium-sized architectural practice. In the instances where Heath's drawings after the late 1940s have been initialled, they show that they are seldom, if ever, from Heath's own hand; whilst in others the draughtsperson is not apparent at all. An architectural practice will seek to and maintain its own particular aesthetic, and this will be one which will reflect the aspirations of the time as much as its founders, and which will give the drawings a certain 'collectiveness', in spite of having been produced by different individuals. In the case of Heath's office, the aesthetic may be seen as being one closely tied to the austere, modernist spirit of the era, as can be seen from several trends which are noticeable in the drawings, including that of the dominance of the automobile, tourism, and other signifiers of increasingly affluent lifestyles.

An Office Job Report dated 31 October 1953 gives a useful account of the activities of Heath's office at that time along with clues through initials to the individuals working for him on different projects. Draftsman Raymond Cull assisted with the Yea, Mornington, Yarra Junction and Mornington hospitals, on Scone Civic Centre, and on the Melbourne Dental Hospital, a project in which public works architect Percy Everett had an early hand, and which Heath was to take to its conclusion in the early 1960s.⁴⁴ 'JM' (probably Jack McColl) had the Minyip, Rupanyup and Nagambie Bush Nursing Hospitals and the Mirboo North Health Centre, as well as several residences in hand. L. (probably Linton) Hughes was working on the Bruce Residence and Peter Parry-Fielder on the Emerson Flats, the Hotchkies residence and the Doring Factory. Heath himself was assigned the Seymour Town Plan (presumably, undergoing another iteration from its original), the 'Essendon Memorial', and was working on the YMCA Building



Frank Heath, Designs for the Lake Boga Motel for V. Wynne. 1961. It was to be a 'botel' as the visitors would moor their boat outside their room rather than park their car as in a motel. Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria [H201 I.35]

with J. M., the Constitutional Club with G. I., and the Melbourne Crematorium with Parry-Fielder. J. M. and J. V. were preparing a design for the Seymour Health Centre. Unassigned works included the St Kilda Baths, Kyabram Showgrounds, Carlton Cricket Ground, Dandenong Homes for the Aged, Guests Factory and 'Jolimont', a remodelled row of townhouses. Perspectives produced for several developments focus strongly on the presence of automobiles tacitly signifying the rising affluence and mobility of the era.

Many of these projects, however worthy, now seem to be utterly products of their time: unadorned, functionalist, utilitarian. But there were some flamboyant departures. In late 1954, Heath was called on to design the Electrical Industries Fair at the Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne. One critic described the firm's efforts thus:

The architect's aim has been to alter the waste height and gloom of the building with a neutral-toned background. The barren columns will be enveloped in grey-coloured cardboard cones picked out in red with the symbol of the Fair. The lengthy lofty corridors will carry false ceilings ten feet from the ground, which will give the impression of a continuous pattern of illuminated glass.⁴⁵

Central to the exhibition, exploiting the illusion created by the false ceilings, a 'Maypole of Light' rose 100 feet. Neil Clerehan, reviewing the exhibition, praised Heath's work as having 'almost achieved the impossible task of making the interior of the Exhibition Building beautiful'. Robin Boyd was similarly impressed by the firm's achievement in transforming the building's cavernous interior.⁴⁶ The drawings depicting these exhibition spaces (many of them by Peter Parry-Fielder) show a new side to the Heath brand. The drawings are bold and brightly coloured, with a central feature of spheres reminiscent of orbiting planets. The drawings for the Australian Industries Fair similarly contain numerous oversized almost monumental elements. The theatrical nature of the perspectives is also unmistakable; they would not be out of place as sets for a period science fiction film and are populated with appropriately slender, austere, and fashionable people for a 'new age'.

Amongst the mundane or whimsically envisaged projects produced from the Heath office in the 1950s, one grand achievement stands out: the winning entry in the competition to design a stadium for the 1956 Olympics. Heath's nephew, the architect Blyth Johnson, remembers 'everyone being used to help with the Olympic Stadium competition drawings'.⁴⁷ Heath was to receive £66,000 for the design which 'was, he emphasised, a co-operative effort by himself and his small team of architects'. As it transpired, budgetary restrictions meant that the Stadium was not built. Heath sought compensation of £43,000⁴⁸ and was awarded £31,665 in 1953.⁴⁹ A further consolation was his involvement in the consortium that designed and built the Olympic Village at Heidelberg West.⁵⁰

From the late 1950s leisure became a more emphatic theme of Heath's work. Having produced schemes for various hotels, motels, and clubs, Heath turned to a lesser known cousin of the form, the 'botel'. An innovative scheme was produced for Lake Boga, near Swan Hill in 1961. Guests would moor their motorboats beneath their

rooms, directly on the lake. Also at this time, Heath returned to new town planning with the Golden Beach development in northern New South Wales, his only project outside Victoria. This was a project at the dawn of the sunbelt migration phenomenon. It was proclaimed to be the ‘holiday resort and township of the future’, complete with civic centre alongside the new go-to development of the day, and a shopping mall with extensive off-street car parking.

Conclusion

Although Heath scaled back his activities in the 1960s and 1970s, he continued to work on favourite projects, such as interiors for the Victorian Artists’ Society. He died in 1980 after a trip to Geraldton, Western Australia, where his father had worked in the decade before he was born. His will left all his professional materials – including his substantial papers – to his nephew, Blyth Johnson; they now form part of the Blyth and Josephine Johnson Collection in the State Library of Victoria. Heath had hoped to persuade Blyth to take on the firm and the Heath name, but the younger man had declined.

The drawings and plans from Heath’s office form a record of the wider issues at play during the period in which they were produced. His community planning projects from the 1940s capture home and neighbourhood as the cornerstones of a refreshed suburban life, both in the metropolis and regional centres. His advocacy of these principles helped to integrate them into mainstream thinking. Heath’s architectural projects sustain a sense of optimism for a more affluent society albeit mediated largely through the limited lens of post-war modernism.

Frank Heath’s greatest importance to the Australian scene was doubtless as a well-informed, professionally-trained planning advocate and innovator in the 1940s when society was primed to embrace a new conception of community-based, efficiently planned and streamlined urban and regional landscapes. His ardent interest in decentralisation and in modern technologies could have led Australia (or at least Victoria, where his interests primarily lay) towards a more egalitarian and arguably sustainable 21st century, had the general will to change lasted longer than a few early postwar years. His architectural work of the 1950s built on that initial premise, and brought to reality modern health and community facilities throughout the state.