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| **Place name:** | Essendon Squash Centre |
| **Address:** | 7 Carlyle Street, Moonee Ponds |
| **Place typology:** | Recreational |
| **Construction date range:** | 1955 (circa) |
| **Architectural style:** | Post-War Modernist |
| **Assessment:** | Built Heritage Pty Ltd, May 2022 |
| **Recommendation:** | To be included in the schedule to the heritage overlay |

**Photos of place:**







*7 Carlyle Street, Moonee Ponds. Photographs by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, May 2022*

**Statement of Significance:**

What is significant?

The Essendon Squash Centre at 7 Carlyle Street, Moonee Ponds, is a double-storey skillion-roofed red brick building in a utilitarian post-war modernist style. It was erected circa 1955 for the Rainey family, who had previously operated public tennis courts nearby and who continued to operate the centre for more than sixty years.

The significant features of the building include:

- The utilitarian expression with blank unpainted brick walls and fenestration that reflect the functions within
- The painted signage 'ESSENDON SQUASH' across the front parapet
- The neon blade signage 'SQUASH'

How is it significant?

7 Carlyle Street, Moonee Ponds, is of local historical and social significance to the City of Moonee Valley.

Why is it significant?

7 Carlyle Street, Moonee Ponds, is significant as a rare, early and remarkably intact example of a purpose-built squash centre. While the sport was introduced into Victoria in the 1920s, it experienced a major surge of popularity in the 1950s and '60s, resulting in a proliferation of stand-alone, public squash centres across the suburbs. Squash proved to be particularly popular in Essendon and surrounds, with four purpose-built centres known to have operated in what is now the City of Moonee Valley by the 1980s, plus two others in nearby Keilor and Tullamarine. Now the only survivor of its type in the municipality, the Essendon Squash Centre provides rare evidence of local enthusiasm for the sport that hit its peak in the final third of the twentieth century. Still operated in 2022 by the same family that established it, this early and notably intact squash centre is also rare on a broader metropolitan scale for its ability to demonstrate the rising popularity of squash from the mid-1950s. (Criterion A; Criterion B).

7 Carlyle Street, Moonee Ponds, is significant as the home of the Essendon Squash Club since its foundation in 1971. The venue retains associations with the club's ongoing activities over more than half a century, including pennant competitions and club member John Dean's continuous gameplay (for 72 hours) that broke a world record in 1975. Current and former members of the club would retain a strong attachment to the place. (Criterion G)

**Description:**

The Essendon Squash Centre, at 7 Carlyle Street, Moonee Ponds, is a clinker brick building of utilitarian form, comprising a large double-height structure with a projecting single-storey facing Carlyle Street. The principal two-storey block, containing the squash courts proper with a mezzanine gallery along one side, has a transverse skillion roof concealed by a capped parapet. The elevations to the (north and south) sides are blank and windowless, with buttress-like piers reinforcing the double-height walls of the courts within, while the mezzanine gallery is expressed externally by a row of six windows to the west (facing Carlyle Street), with metal-framed sashes, some with original rippled glazing. Above the window line, there is a wide, white-painted frieze bearing the name ESSENDON SQUASH and, at the far left, a projecting neon blade sign with the word SQUASH on only one side (ie, facing towards Buckley Street). To the rear, there is a second double-height block of squash courts, not readily visible from the street.

The single-storey front wing has a low skillion roof, clad in metal tray deck. Its asymmetrical facade comprises an off-centre entrance with glazed door, two sidelight windows and a simple flat-roofed canopy on metal pipe columns, and a row of six smaller square windows with brick sills and timber-framed sashes with vented glazing.

The building is set back from Carlyle Street with an area of lawn, concrete pathways, and a narrow pebbled garden bed that extends across the front of the entry wing.

**History:**

Contextual History

City of Moonee Valley occupies part of the Traditional lands of the Wurundjeri-willam clan of the Woi-wurrung people. Many sites in the area now known as City of Moonee Valley show evidence of Woi-wurrung activities and spiritual connections. Fish were trapped in the rivers and creeks, stone was quarried from the river edges, murnong daisy was collected and kangaroos hunted across grassland areas, and bark was harvested from trees in the river valleys. This relationship between the Woi-wurrung and the land, water, animals and plants, continues to this day (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.29).

The first Europeans to explore the area known as Moonee Valley was a surveyor, Charles Grimes in 1803. In 1836, settlers moving from Van Diemen's Land crossed the area in the hope of finding empty, cheap and plentiful land for sheep. By 1842, surveyors had created the first map of the Parish of Doutta Galla and then Woi-wurrung lands were offered for sale by the British Crown to Europeans (noting that the land was never ceded). The Wurundjeri were moved off their land which had a profound impact on their culture, health and language. By 1860, the entire parish was sold (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.32-33).

Early development of the area began with the goldrush period of the 1850s which saw Mount Alexander Road used as a thoroughfare to the diggings with over 30,000 people estimated as moving along the dirt road each week. Businesses and shops sprang up providing sustenance, transport and accommodation to service the passing gold rush trade. Some very early wayside hotels and shops still survive from this period (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p. 51-54). After the heady days of the goldrush, the 1860s saw Essendon, Ascot Vale, Moonee Ponds and Flemington develop into permanent townships. The development of railways by private companies gave huge impetus to suburban development of the area with the opening of the Essendon railway in 1860. The government purchased the line in 1868. Suburban trains terminated at Essendon and it wasn't until 1889 that Ascot Vale, Moonee Ponds and Newmarket stations were completed. By 1893 stations opened at Strathmore and Pascoe Vale and in 1922 Glenbervie Station opened. The railways provided an enormous boost to residential development along the line and those who had previously moved to areas without trains, now clamoured for them (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.59).

By the 1880s Essendon had become a Borough and by 1891 had a population of 14,411. Many subdivisions occurred during the land boom of the 1880s and many failed to eventuate due to the depression of the 1890s. In the interwar period a boom in subdivision and residential infill occurred in Travancore, Essendon, Ascot Vale, Strathmore and Moonee Ponds, which was focused on new transport routes along the tram lines, first established to Essendon in 1905. In 1919 the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board was formed and lines were extended and improved. The tram lines saw development occur either side of Maribyrnong Road, further along Mt Alexander Road, Buckley Street and Keilor Road (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.65-68, p.115).

Education was an important consideration in the development of the municipality, with schools having been established in Essendon and Flemington in the 1850s. The development of State schools in the area reflects the major phases of education and includes a number of 'firsts'; the first non-denominational school in Victoria was set up in Essendon in 1850, the first purpose-built infants school in the state was set up in 1902, and Essendon High School was the first purpose-built high school in the Melbourne metropolitan area. Denominational schools were also set up in the area in the early 1850s, with more private schools established during the boom period of the 1880s. Residents wanted a better life than the one most had left behind in Britain, including a good education for their children (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.157-161).

In the three decades after the Second World War, Melbourne's suburbs ballooned outward to cater for post-war migration, the baby boom, an increasing need for new housing, and a more car-centred economy. Areas to the north of Essendon had been open paddocks in 1945, but by 1950 the Shire of Keilor found themselves with a

developing suburb with no name. It was later called Niddrie. Similarly, Airport West was developing quickly with houses being built before the roads. By 1964 it was claimed that Airport West had the cheapest cream brick veneers in Melbourne (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.120-121). Many houses in these post-war areas were austere weatherboard or brick veneer bungalows, with a few scattered architect-designed or project homes on new blocks, particularly along the Boulevard in Aberfeldie. These post-war housing areas were car-centred communities located close to industry along Keilor Road, Matthews Avenue around Essendon Airport and East Keilor. By 1960 Airport West had its first hotel, the famous Skyways Hotel and then in the 1970s the first shopping centre, owned by Westfield, was begun (heritage ALLIANCE, G*ap Heritage Study*, 2005: pp.28-30).

Post-war housing pressure also saw a huge investment by the Housing Commission of Victoria who developed 150 bungalows in concrete, weatherboard and brick in Aberfeldie. They then began an ambitious estate of houses and flats on a 77 acre site at Ascot Vale in 1949. These low-rise walk-up flats eventually gave rise to the high-rise flats of Flemington which opened in June 1965 (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.123).

Many post-war migrants bought or built houses in the outer areas of the municipality, close to employment and industry and where new, cheaper housing was readily available. These developments and public housing in Aberfeldie, Ascot Vale and Flemington have had a long-lasting effect on the nature of the Moonee Valley community which today is one of the most diverse and vibrant in Melbourne (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.124).

Place history

The Essendon Squash Centre, at 7 Carlyle Street, Moonee Ponds, was erected circa 1955 by businessman David Rainey, who resided on the opposite side of Carlyle Street and had previously operated tennis courts on a large adjacent site fronting Buckley Street.

The son of a police constable, David Allan Rainey (1910-1977) was born in Drouin in western Gippsland. By the early 1930s, he was working as a postal employee and residing with his parents and sister in Minyip, but later transferred to Casterton. In 1941, while still residing in Casterton, Rainey married Edna Lorraine Murrell (1915-2012), daughter of a local butcher. The couple settled in Moonee Ponds in the later 1940s, taking up residence in an Edwardian brick villa at 2 Carlyle Street. Rainey acquired the adjacent land, fronting Buckley Street, and duly established a complex of three public tennis courts (two on the west corner of Carlyle Street, and one on the east corner) that became known as the *Station Tennis Courts*, in reference to the nearby Essendon railway station.

After successfully operating the *Station Tennis Courts* for several years, the Raineys opted to expand the business by erecting an indoor squash centre on the opposite (east) side of Carlyle Street. This appears to have been constructed during 1955, as the completed building is visible on an aerial photograph dated March 1956. The same photograph shows Rainey's three tennis courts still extant along Buckley Street, although he would soon sell off the land for redevelopment. This commenced in the early 1960s with construction of a house on the west corner of Buckley Street (now No 111), followed by a pair of flats next door (No 113) and, subsequently, a shop on the east corner (No 109). During the early 1960s, Rainey also developed the vacant land to the immediate north of the squash centre, erecting a new detached brick residence (now 5 Carlyle Street) for himself, his wife Edna, and their son, John David Rainey, who was then working as a sales representative. The couple also had two other sons, Noel and Donald.

In 1971, David and Edna Rainey retired from running the squash centre and moved to a larger house in Emerald Street, Essendon West. The squash centre was taken over by their eldest son John and his wife, Sue, who continued to reside in the adjacent house at No 5. Amongst John and Sue's immediate innovations was the foundation, during that year, of the Essendon Squash Club. In June 1974, the squash centre was advertised for sale by auction, described as "four brick squash courts including shops, spectators' gallery, change rooms, toilets, etc". However, the auction did not proceed and the Raineys continued to own and operate the centre. The following year, the centre hosted an attempt by club member and local resident John Dean to break the world record for continuous squash gameplay against a rotating series of opponents. Competing for 72 hours, Deans reportedly earned himself a place in the *Guinness Book of Records,* although his record was subsequently broken in Fiji by a Chinese-born squash player, Devlin Ah Sam, who competed for 75 hours (Daryl Tarte, *Fiji: A Place to*

*Call Home*, p.148). Evidently, this particular category is no longer entertained by the *Guinness Book of Records*, which now only maintains marathon records for squash gameplay between two individuals.

In 1987, after John Rainey took another job, his wife Sue continued to operate the squash centre on her own; the couple separated in 1993. Sue Rainey also continued in her role as president of the Essendon Squash Club. The club's twentieth-fifth anniversary in 1996 coincided with another milestone, when Sue Rainey competed in her one thousandth pennant game. The club has since gone on to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary in 2021. The occasion was marked by the preparation of an official club history titled *Cede Nullis: Fifty Golden Years of the Essendon Squash Club*, scheduled to be launched in July 2022.

**Sources:**

Primary Sources

*Sands & McDougall Directory of Victoria*, various.
"Melbourne Outer Suburbs Project", aerial photograph. Run 8, Frame 7, dated February 1956. Central Plan Office, Melbourne. <www.landata.vic.gov.au>

Secondary Sources

Peter Norris (ed), *The New Guinness Book of Records 1996*. (London: Guinness Publishing Ltd, 1995).
R W Chalmers, *The Annals of Essendon.* Vol 2, 1925-1962. (Essendon: Essendon Historical Society, 1998).
R W Chalmers, *The Annals of Essendon.* Vol 3, 1963-1985. (Essendon: Essendon Historical Society, 2005).
R W Chalmers, *The Annals of Essendon.* Vol 4, 1986-2000. (Essendon: Essendon Historical Society, 2005).
Daryl Tarte, *Fiji: A Place to Call Home* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014).
"Guinness World Records", <www.guinnessworldrecords.com>

**Thematic Context:**

*City of Moonee Valley Thematic Environmental History*, 2012

9.0 Shaping cultural and creative life

9.1 Participating in sport and recreation

**Comparative Analysis:**

Squash Centres in Victoria

Formalised squash playing in Victoria dates back to 1927, when the first purpose-built courts were installed at the Royal Melbourne Tennis Club. The sport's popularity rose rapidly and, by the late 1930s, there were reportedly over fifty public and private squash courts across Victoria. Amongst the sport's early enthusiasts in Melbourne were architect Esmond Dorney, who designed and built a freestanding squash court at the rear of his own house in Sandringham (since demolished). In the early 1950s, a rising number of clubs and institutions added squash courts to their recreational facilities, including the Navy & Military Club, the Williamstown RSL, Ormond College at the University of Melbourne and the Nicholas Aspro factory in Chadstone. From the later 1950s and into the early '60s, the sport's burgeoning popularity ushered in a spate of stand-alone purpose-built squash centres across the entire metropolitan area.

In order to place the Essendon Squash Centre in context as an early surviving example of its type on a metropolitan scale, the following is a select list of broadly contemporaneous purpose-built squash centres in suburban Melbourne:

- Moorabbin Squash Courts, 18-20 Station Street, Moorabbin (circa 1954) – *demolished*
- Ajax Squash Courts, 97 Alma Road, St Kilda (Harry Ernest, 1958) – *standing but much altered*

- 'Squashway' Squash Courts, 1216 High Street, Malvern (L V Connell, 1959) – *standing but much altered*
- Malvern Squash Courts, 1485 Malvern Rd, Malvern (Marsh, Bennie &Barry, 1959) – *demolished 2017*
- Altona Squash Courts, 187-189 Millers Road, Altona North (1960) – *demolished circa 2011*
- Peninsula Squash Courts, 1-3 Playne Street, Frankston (circa 1960) – *demolished*
- Gardenvale Squash Courts, 116-120 Martin Street, Elsternwick (Harry Ernest, 1961) – *demolished circa 2015*
- Mentone Squash Courts, 15 Balcombe Road, Mentone (circa 1961) – *demolished circa 2012*
- Toorak Station Squash Courts, 26-29 Beatty Avenue, Armadale (circa 1962) – *demolished circa 2016*

Other local squash centres

By the 1980s, there were four purpose-built squash centres in what is now the City of Moonee Valley, plus another one just across the municipal border in Tullamarine. As of 2022, the Essendon Squash Centre is the only survivor of these four local centres in the municipality, although the one in nearby Tullamarine (now City of Hume) is still in operation.

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| Moonee Ponds Squash Courts,<br>81-85 Wilson Street, Moonee Ponds (circa 1941)<br>Erected on a site developed by Leon Moxham from 1938 as the "Wilson Street Tennis Courts". The squash centre, originally with two courts, was added circa 1941 and expanded further over the years. The venue was still in operation in the 1990s. The site is now occupied by flats. | ***NO IMAGE AVAILABLE*** |
| Don Squash Academy,<br>333-335 Keilor Road, Essendon North (1966)<br>This centre was established and operated by the Mounsey family, who finally sold it in 1988. The Don Squash Club, based there for many years, disbanded because it was unable find another venue. The centre was demolished and the site redeveloped with an office block. | ***NO IMAGE AVAILABLE*** |
| Ascot Vale Leisure Centre<br>Pynor Avenue, Ascot Vale (1977)<br>As originally built, the Ascot Vale Leisure Centre included three squash courts, an indoor swimming pool, gymnasium, sauna and other facilities. Another three squash courts were added when the centre was extended in 1979. At least five of these courts remained in operation into the early 2000s, although they have since been subsumed by successive phases of redevelopment. | <br>*Source: Google StreetView, March 2021* |
| Focus Health & Fitness Centre<br>35 Carrick Drive, Tullamarine (circa 1982)<br>This recreational complex, which appears to date from the early 1980s, comprised ten squash courts as well as gymnasium, spa, sauna and other facilities. Originally known as the Gladstone Park Squash Centre and later as GP Squash City, it is currently known as the Focus Health & Fitness Centre. The original brown brickwork (shown in photograph, right) was overpainted in a dark blue colour in the 2010s. | <br>*Source: Google StreetView, Dec 2009* |

Research has unearthed another local squash centre located just outside the boundaries of the City of Moonee Valley. Located at 13-19 Fosters Road, Keilor Park, this centre opened circa 1977 with ten squash courts, and remained in operation into the 1990s. While the building still stands, it has been converted into a block of residential apartments known as *Dreamview Terrace* and can no longer be readily interpreted as a former squash centre.

**Recommendation:**

That the whole of 7 Carlyle Street, Moonee Ponds, be included in the Heritage Overlay schedule.

**Schedule:**

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| External Paint Controls | Yes (to preserve painted signage) |
| Internal Alteration Controls | No |
| Tree Controls | No |
| Solar Energy Controls | Yes |
| Fences and Outbuildings | No |
| Prohibited Uses | No |
| Aboriginal Heritage Place | No |