Place name:	Ascot Free Kindergarten; E B Basford Free Kindergarten (former)
Address:	1 West Street, Ascot Vale (202a Ascot Vale Road, Ascot Vale)
Place typology:	Educational
Construction date range:	1951-52
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:



Photograph by Megan McDougall, May 2021





Photographs by Built Heritage Pty Ltd, May 2022

Statement of Significance:

What is significant?

The Ascot Free Kindergarten, at 1 West Street, Ascot Vale, is a gable-roofed clinker brick pre-school building in a simple post-war modernist style. It was erected in 1951-52 to a design by architect and local resident Harry Winbush.

The significant features of the building include:

- Its pitched roofline with fibro-cement infill to the gable end
- Its clinker brickwork
- The stepped north-east elevation with its regular fenestration, projecting bay and multi-paned sashes

How is it significant?

1 West Street, Ascot Vale, is of local historical and architectural significance to the City of Moonee Valley.

Why is it significant?

The Ascot Free Kindergarten is historically significant for associations with the expansion of local pre-school facilities in the early post-war period, responding to the so-called Baby Boom of the mid-twentieth century. As a Free Kindergarten, the building has more specific associations with the growth of the Free Kindergarten movement, which emerged in the early 1900s and gained momentum during the inter-war period before ushering in a post-war influx of new purpose-built pre-school centres. Opened in early 1952, it is one of the earliest surviving Free Kindergartens in what is now the City of Moonee Valley, predated only by a much-altered example in Roseberry Street, Ascot Vale. (Criterion A)

The Ascot Free Kindergarten is architecturally significant as a representative and substantially intact example of the so-called "model kindergartens" that emerged in Melbourne in the late 1930s and proliferated into the 1950s. Drawing from pre-war prototypes erected in each state capital, these model kindergartens were characterised (as in this case) by large playrooms (incorporating alcoves, raised platforms and built-in toy shelving) with an emphasis on for natural lighting and ventilation expressed by large window bays and glazed doors opening onto sunny north-facing terrace or verandahs. (Criterion D).

Description:

The Ascot Free Kindergarten, at 1 West Street, Ascot Vale, is a single-storey building of red clinker brick construction with a gabled roof clad in corrugated steel sheeting. It occupies an odd-shaped block of land with separate street frontages to the east (West Street) and west (Ascot Vale Road) and an angled boundary to the south-west, along the railway line, where there is also a pedestrian right-of-way linking the two street frontages. Oriented parallel to the railway line, the hall-like building is effectively rectangular in plan, although one corner is splayed where it abuts the property's northern boundary. At the splayed end, the gabled roof terminates in a hip, while the opposite (south-west) end has a gable end with strapped cement sheeting and a pair of small rectangular louvred vents. A small plain brick chimney also projects through the roof at this end of the building.

The principal elevation of the pre-school, to the north-east, is divided into a series of full-height bays, which contain rows of multi-paned rectangular sashes and glazed doors. At the far end, there is a projecting bay window and an angled corner entrance, all similarly detailed. This facade opens onto a full-width skillion-roofed verandah, supported on posts. A small skillion-roofed storeroom (as extended in 1981) projects from the south-east end of the building. The south-west elevation, which abuts the right-of-way along the railway line, has simple fenestration and a single doorway with a highlight window; the clinker brickwork has been painted red.

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).

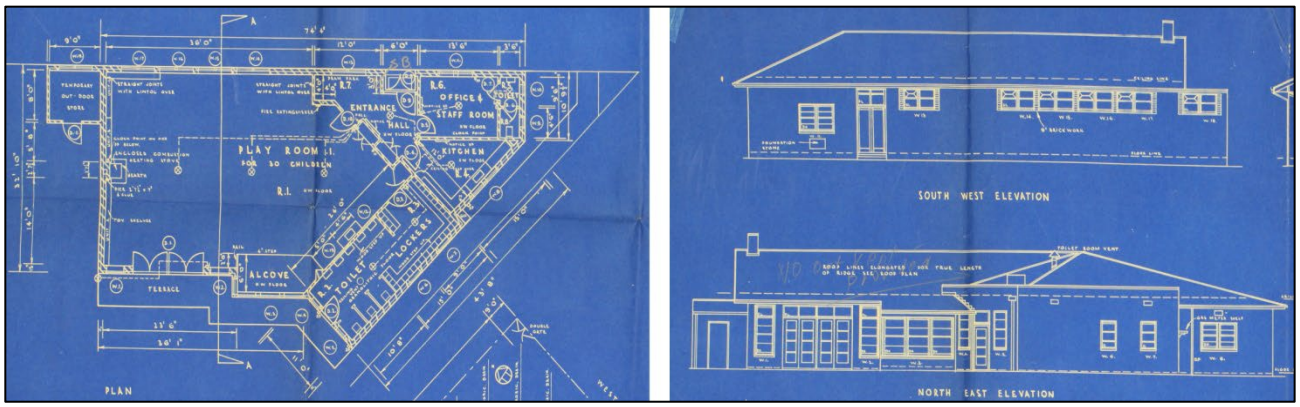
Place history

The Ascot Free Kindergarten (originally named the E B Basford Free Kindergarten) at 1 West Street, Ascot Vale, was erected in 1951-52 following several years of planning and fundraising initiated by local businessman and ward councilor Ernest Basford, after whom the kindergarten was initially to be named.

In Australia, the Free Kindergarten movement emerged in New South Wales in the late 1890s and duly spread to South Australia, where a pre-school opened in Adelaide in 1905, and thence to Victoria, where the first two counterparts commenced operation at Burnley (1906) and Collingwood (1907). Burgeoning interest from residents of other localities prompted the establishment of the Free Kindergarten Union of Victoria (FKU) in 1909. The following year saw at least four new Free Kindergartens established across the metropolitan area, and many more emerged thereafter. However, almost three decades passed before community agitation increased for the establishment of such a facility in the City of Essendon. Plans came to a fore in early 1937, when the Mayor's wife, Mrs May Divers, presided over a meeting at the Moonee Ponds Town Hall. The convener, Ascot Vale resident Mary Rundle, pointed out that the only pre-school facility then available in the municipality was a special class for four-and-a-half-year-old children at the Ascot Vale State School (*Age*, 12 February 1937, p.6). It was resolved that a free kindergarten be established, and a sub-committee formed to consider possible sites (*Essendon Gazette,* 18 February 1937). The pre-school commenced operation in June 1938, temporarily accommodated in a local church hall before relocating the following year to a prefabricated building in Roseberry Street, Ascot Vale. Two years later, the foundation stone was laid for a purpose-built counterpart on the site, designed by Martin & Tribe.

Expansion of free kindergartens in the City of Essendon resumed in 1944, when two new facilities began operation from existing premises: one in St Thomas's Memorial Hall next to the Moonee Ponds Town Hall, and the other in the Christ Church Parish Hall on Mount Alexander Road (the latter also the first free kindergarten in Victoria established by the Anglican church). In 1947, another free kindergarten in Ascot Vale was mooted by resident Ernest Beresford Basford (1906-2002), newly-elected councilor and proprietor of Basford's Furniture Emporium in Union Road, who had been invited to stand for council that year as a representative for the Moonee Ponds Traders (*Community News*, 21 January 1986). At the kindergarten's inaugural meeting, held in October 1947 in the Ascot Vale Congregational Church hall, it was resolved to name it after Basford in recognition of his support (*Essendon Gazette*, 16 October 1947). Fundraising continue and; by the end of that year, a Queen Carnival had raised over £670 for "the E B Basford Free Kindergarten" (*Argus,* 22 December 1947, p.5).

A site was duly acquired along the railway line in Ascot Vale East, and plans were prepared by architect and Essendon resident Harry Winbush (1903-1990), who maintained a thriving private practice while also acting as Head of Architecture at Melbourne Technical College from 1943 until he retired in 1968. Residing in a house of his own design at 80 Fletcher Street (1936), Winbush undertook countless local commissions over several decades, including buildings for churches, schools and community groups (in some cases, designed in a honorary capacity) as well as a grandstand at Windy Hill, the new municipal library and a tenpin bowling alley. Winbush's drawings for the new kindergarten at Ascot Vale, dated March 1951, show a brick building on a canted plan (due to the irregular shape of the site) with playroom, toilets, lockers, kitchen and staff room, with a small projecting storeroom at the south-east end. Following the precepts of a standard "model kindergarten" of the era, the playroom incorporated built-in storage and toy shelving, generous north-facing windows and a projecting alcove with a raised floor to create a distinct play area. Toilet and locker facilities were carefully scaled to young children, including elevated platforms to facilitate access to washbasins.



Excerpt of Harry Winbush's working drawings, dated March 1951 Source: Public Building File 9375, VPRS 7882/P1, PROV.

Construction began in August 1951, when an advertisement sought bricklayers ("labour only") for a "solid brick kindergarten, Ascot Vale" (*The Age*, 4 August 1951, p.39). Two months later, the foundation stone was laid by the Director of Education, A H Ramsay, who observed that it was "a very important day for parents and children when the foundation stone of a kindergarten is laid" (*The Age,* 29 October 1951, p.7). In accordance with tradition, copies of the building's plans, a balance sheet and some coins were placed in the cavity before the stone was set. At that time, it was expected that the building would be finished within nine months. However, just over a year passed before it was officially opened in November 1952 by the Lady Herring, wife of Victoria's Lieutenant-Governor, before of a crowd of 200 people (*Essendon Gazette*, 27 November 1952).

While early reports indicated that the kindergarten would be name after E B Basford, the working drawings identify it as the Ascot Vale East Free Kindergarten, and it appears in directory listings as the Ascot Vale Free Kindergarten. In October 1963, the name was further amended by deletion of the word "Free". Since then, relatively few changes have been made to the building. In 1981, the projecting storeroom was extended, and its window opening to the right-of-way was bricked up to prevent ingress by vandals. The facility remains in operation as the Ascot Kindergarten.

Sources:

Primary sources

The Age
The Argus
Community News
Essendon Gazette
Public Building File No 9375, Box 1087, VPRS 7882/P1. PROV, North Melbourne.
"Tenders", *Age*, 4 August 1951, p.39.
"Foundation for kindergarten", *Age*, 29 October 1951, p.7.

Secondary sources

R.W. Chalmers, *The Annals of Essendon.* Vol 2, 1925-1962. (Essendon: Essendon Historical Society, 1998)
David Nichols and Philip Goad, "Early Learning: The Modern Kindergarten", in Philip Goad and Hannah Lewis (eds), *Community: Building Modern Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2010), pp.52-83.
Built Heritage Pty Ltd, research file on Harry Winbush.

Thematic Context:

City of Moonee Valley Thematic Environmental History, 2012

8.0 Building community life

8.2 Educating people

Comparative Analysis:

The following is a list of the major purpose-built kindergartens in the City of Moonee Valley from the 1940s to the 1960s:

- Coronation Free Kindergarten, 34 Roseberry Street, Ascot Vale (Martin & Tribe, 1940-41) – *much altered*
- Hopetoun Free Kindergarten, 220 Racecourse Road, Flemington (1945) – *demolished 1986*
- Christ Church of England Free Kindergarten, 1 Marco Polo Street, Essendon (1950)
- East Keilor Pre-School Centre, 11 Matthews Avenue, Niddrie (1952) – *demolished*
- Ascot Free Kindergarten, 1 West Street, Ascot Vale (Harry Winbush, 1951-52) – *included in this study*
- Ascot West Progress Kindergarten, 11 Brown Avenue, Ascot Vale (1952-53) – *HO391*
- East Essendon Methodist Church Kindergarten Hall, 43 Albion Street, Essendon (1953) – *demolished*
- Strathmore Methodist Church Kindergarten Hall, 249 Napier Street, Strathmore (1954) – *demolished*
- Aberfeldie Baby Health & Pre-School Centre, 13 Beaver Street, Aberfeldie (1955-56)
- St Aidan's Free Kindergarten, 5 James Street, Strathmore (Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell, 1956) – *part of HO347*
- Ave Maria Kindergarten, 35 Fawkner Street, Aberfeldie (Alan Niven, 1956) – *altered*
- Avondale Heights Infant Welfare & Preschool Centre, 7 Clarendon Street, Avondale Heights (1962) – *demolished*
- Doutta Galla (now North Essendon) Kindergarten, 51 Kerferd Street, Essendon North (c1963) – *altered*
- Keilor East Infant Welfare & Preschool Centre, 31 Mark Street, Keilor East (1967) – *HO432*
- Airport West Infant Welfare & Preschool Centre, 97 McNamara Ave, Airport West (J R Hulme, 1968-70) – *HO387*

These examples encapsulate the ongoing development of modern pre-school architecture in Victoria in the middle third of the twentieth century. This emerged in the mid-1930s after the creation of the National Health & Medical Research Council, which sought to upgrade facilities relating to maternal health and child welfare, including pre-schools. Guidelines were sought from noted Melbourne paediatrician Dr Vera Scantlebury-Brown, who recommended that a model kindergarten be established in each state capital. The first of these, opened in Carlton in December 1939, was designed by architect Marcus Martin along progressive lines, with an emphasis on efficient planning and adequate natural light and ventilation. It ushered in a new era of modern pre-school centres, characterised by the use of clerestory windows and bays of french doors opening onto terraces or verandahs. Two high-profile examples were built by the Melbourne City Council at North Melbourne (1940) and Flemington (1945), and many other municipalities followed suit. The architectural firm of Martin & Tribe (of which Marcus Martin was principal) became experts in the field and later designed a celebrated and influential "model kindergarten" at Auburn (1948-50) that became the prototype for a succession of others well into the 1950s, several of which were designed by Martin's partner Horace Tribe.

Only four of the surviving post-war kindergartens listed above are currently included on the heritage overlay (HO) schedule. The one in Strathmore is not individually listed, but is included within the curtilage of St Aidan's Anglican Church, a building of individual architectural merit. Two other examples, at Avondale Heights and Keilor East, are not directly comparable to the subject building because they both date from the late 1960s. The most relevant comparator on the HO schedule is the Ascot West Progress Kindergarten, located in the same suburb and of similar date and character. This is actually slightly predated by the kindergarten in West Street, which renders the latter of the earliest surviving examples of its type in the study area, and certainly one the best preserved. It contrasts with the Coronation Free Kindergarten, also located in Ascot Vale, which, while dating from 1940-41 (and designed by the office of Martin Tribe), has since been extended and altered. Its original street frontage, with strapped cement sheeting with an offset door and horizontal strip window, has been rendered unrecognisable by recladding in timber planks and the addition of a new gabled front porch.

The following illustrates the three most pertinent comparators from the above list: two examples from the 1940s that pre-date the subject building, and another from the early 1950s that slightly post-dates it.

 *Coronation Free Kindergarten, Ascot Vale (1940-41; much altered)* *Source: State Library of Victoria*	 *Hopetoun Free Kindergarten, Flemington (1945; demolished 1986)* *Source: State Library of Victoria*	 *Progress Kindergarten, Ascot Vale (1952-53); heritage overlay HO391* *Source: www.progresskinder.org.au*

Recommendation:

That the whole of 1 West Street, Ascot Vale, be included in the Heritage Overlay schedule.

Schedule:

External Paint Controls	No
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	No
Solar Energy Controls	Yes
Fences and Outbuildings	No
Prohibited Uses	No
Aboriginal Heritage Place	No