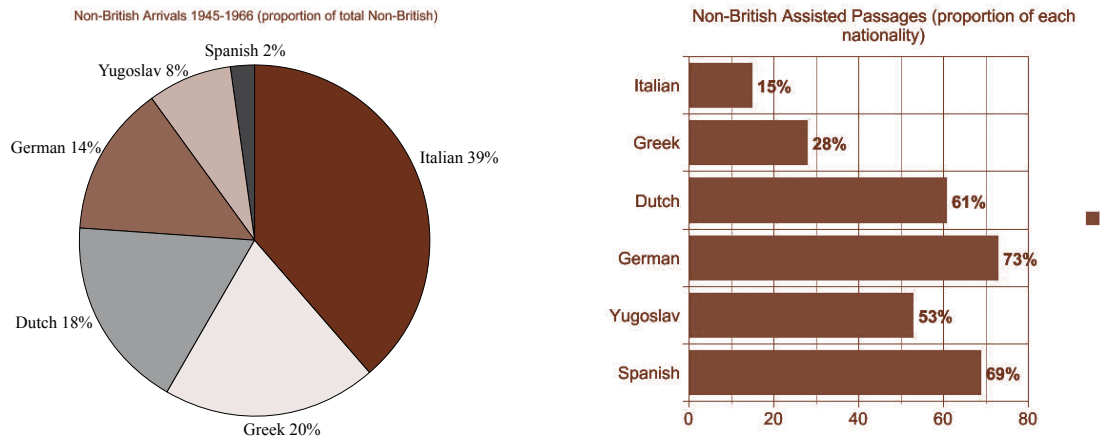


GREEK JOURNEYS THROUGH BONEGILLA

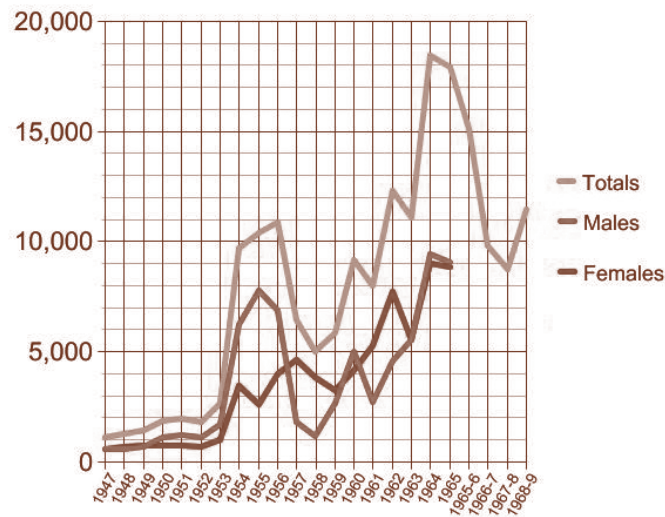


Non-British Migration to Australia, 1945-1966

The vast majority of Australia's non-British migrants came from eight countries. Paradoxically the greatest influx was from Southern European countries, Greece and Italy, which received the least assistance. The great bulk of Greeks and Italians to come to Australia were privately sponsored individuals.



Greek Arrivals in Australia, 1945-1966



GREEK JOURNEYS THROUGH BONEGILLA

Greek Migration to Post-war Australia

In the immediate post-war years, Australia launched a bold mass immigration program to increase the size of its population: a large workforce would boost economic development; more people could better defend the country. Initially Australia encouraged immigrants from the United Kingdom and Displaced Persons from war-torn Europe. Even within a few years the Australian economy became dependent on a constant flow of migrant labour, but the Displaced Persons scheme slowed about 1951 and ended in 1953. Australia became a founding member of the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, which was set up to provide assistance for Europeans in overcrowded countries to move to under-crowded countries. Through and with the ICEM, Australia made migration agreements initially with The Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Austria and Greece. It also took people from other countries including, for example, Yugoslavia. Between 1951 and 1959, the ICEM arranged for 233 000 people to come to Australia, principally from Greece and Italy.

Even before Australia reached a migration agreement with Greece in 1952, over 5 000 Greeks had arrived since the war ended. They were privately sponsored by Greeks already resident in Australia who were prepared to guarantee housing and employment. From 1953 to mid-1956 there was a large influx of Greek migrants: about half of the 33 639 to arrive were assisted by the ICEM and Australian Government: almost all were processed at the Bonegilla Reception and Training Centre. These contingents of assisted Greek migrants arriving between 1953 and June 1956 provided the impetus for subsequent Greek migration. They and those they brought formed an extensive migration chain in which they nominated wives, sisters, fiancés and other close relatives for assisted passages and for unassisted admission. In 1947 12 291 Greek-born people lived in Australia. By 1961 that number of Australian residents born in Greece had increased six-fold. By 1971 it doubled again.

The Bonegilla Reception and Training Centre was the official employment office through which about 15 000 assisted Greek migrants were processed in what was called ‘the ICEM Greek Project’ between 1953 and 1956. It was from Bonegilla that many Greeks started work and life journeys within Australia.

In 2007 the Block 19 remnant of the former Reception Centre was placed on the National Heritage List.

Bonegilla holds powerful connection for many people in Australia.... [It] forms an important part of Australia’s recent collective memory and has become a symbol of post-World War II migration. It represents the role of Australia as the ‘host’ nation.... Bonegilla and its associated oral and written records yield insights into post-war migration and refugee experiences. *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, 7 December 2007.

What insights do the site and its records yield (i) into assisted Greek migrant arrival and early settlement experiences and (ii) into post-war Australian immigration policies and practices? How have the arrival and early settlement experiences of assisted Greeks been remembered or re-imagined? What kind of place was Bonegilla for Greeks?

GREEK JOURNEYS THROUGH BONEGILLA

RECEIVING 500 GREEK FARMERS, 1953

In late February 1953, a party of 77 assisted Greek migrants arrived at Bonegilla. They were the first of what was to be a group of 500 Greek Farmers in an ICEM project that might lead to further Greek migration. The emphasis was to be on single male rural workers. Only some families would be involved. The initial party included sixty single males and five families, three with one child and two with two children. All 500 had arrived by mid-July 1953.

Avoiding Bonegilla

The Greek Community in Australia had been pressing the Australian Government to recruit and assist migrants from Greece. It was pleased that the ICEM project had got underway and hoped for its success and expansion.¹ The community, however, did not hold high expectations of the style of accommodation at the Bonegilla 'military camp' or the employment assistance proffered by the Commonwealth Employment Service at Bonegilla. They generally advised newcomers to avoid Bonegilla.

Reception Centre Accommodation

The former army camp at Bonegilla in North-east Victoria was to provide temporary accommodation for all non-British migrants as they arrived. At Bonegilla they would be processed and distributed to jobs all over Australia. Authorities explained in 1953 that as a Migrant Reception and Training Centre, Bonegilla had successfully received and processed approximately 120 000 newcomers in the five years it had been operating. Its reception processes were well honed, its job distribution system and training activities were well organised. The accommodation facilities were ample and, indeed, were in the process of being upgraded to suit the needs of voluntary assisted migrants. The local media (*Border Morning Mail*) was assured in April 1953 that the Centre had lost a lot of its harsh edges. Bonegilla was operating like a small country town.²

Much of this true, but the long, illustrated story in the local newspaper was part of a publicity exercise to rebuild public confidence in the Centre. Many assisted migrants from a variety of nations, and perhaps also the Australian public, remained unsure about the style of accommodation Bonegilla offered. The Centre had attracted unfavourable notice in the metropolitan press in 1949 and again in 1952. Critical reports of inadequate child care at the Centre emerged when a large number of newly arrived infants died from malnutrition during the winter months of 1949.³ In 1952 Bonegilla attracted similar critical reports when resident Italian migrants took part in violent protests against having to stay at the Centre for prolonged times.⁴ The Italian migrants expressed their dissatisfaction not only with the lack of jobs, but also with the food they were served, the lack of heating and the paucity of the recreation facilities at Bonegilla.

Both the health scandal of 1949 and the demonstrations of 1952 were reported nation-wide and attracted international attention. Bonegilla had attracted a notoriety that immigration authorities were anxious to dispel. The facilities at Bonegilla may have proved adequate for the large number of displaced persons who arrived in the immediate post-war years, but voluntary assisted migrants arriving from 1951 onwards expected something better.

The first assisted Greeks came when Bonegilla was still being refashioned into a more welcoming reception centre. The Australian Greek Community referred to it as a military camp, tightly regulated and run along military lines. It retained that reputation and was sometimes referred to as a 'concentration camp' from which the lucky 'escaped'.⁵

Employment Arrangements

The first assisted Greeks came at a difficult time for Australian immigration authorities. An economic recession in 1952 had pushed unemployment levels to a new post-war high. Government had been forced to review its commitment to its mass post-war immigration program. Plainly there was no point in bringing in large numbers of additional workers to Australia when there was little prospect of their obtaining work quickly. Government had decided to halve the proposed migrant intake for 1953, although it hoped this was but a temporary interruption, for it was convinced that the immigration program was necessary to bolster the country's long-term economic development. That program would resume as soon as economic conditions improved. Indeed, Harold Holt, the Minister for Immigration, arranged a trip to Europe during the European summer of 1953 to reassure seven donor countries, including Greece, that Australia would resume recruiting large numbers of migrants in the near future. It still wanted to relieve them of their even great unemployment problems. In 1953 Australia was simply taking a 'breather'.⁶

The Department of Labour and National Service was in charge of employment and used its Commonwealth Employment Service to manage migrant employment processes. District Employment Officers in the eastern states supplied Employment Officers at Bonegilla with lists of job vacancies they had compiled from government and private employer requests. Employers might sometimes indicate the special skills or attributes they would prefer. Sometimes they specified a nationality. But, in general, they were unspecific; they simply wanted a number of labourers or domestics. There would be some indication of the kind of accommodation available, the award wages to be paid and the likelihood of overtime. The first charge on Bonegilla Employment Officers was to fill vacancies in designated priority areas where the nation had difficulty in finding workers, for example, in rural

sector, brick and tile works, tanneries, pipe making and pipe laying, gas and water reticulation, railway construction, manufacturing and domestic duties.

Bonegilla Employment Officers would explain to the migrants the geography of the position and suggest accommodation arrangements for the employee and his family. The migrants might decline two offers, but were then in danger of losing their social service benefits if they persisted in not taking up a position. They were reminded that, in return for their assisted passage, they had entered a contract to be employed as directed for two-years. It has been suggested that the alternative prospect of lingering long at a bleak and isolated reception centre strengthened the incentive for migrants to take up whatever job was on offer.⁷

Dispatch from Bonegilla usually meant dispatch from government responsibility. The employment office at Bonegilla had only the responsibility of finding an initial workplace. It was unusual for any but the late summer Murray Valley fruit harvesters to return to Bonegilla. Once placed, the migrant had to report to the nearest district employment office if the job ceased. If the migrant was still within his or her two-year contract, new work would be allocated, usually within the state of first deployment.

Employment officers usually had interpreters to help them interview migrants from a variety of nations.



No migrant was pleased with the way little notice was taken of his or her previous experience, qualifications, skills or interests. Their choices were limited and often centred on whether they were to be separated from their families. The Italians were dissatisfied with the temporary positions they were offered as part of 'emergency employment' scheme devised to quell the unrest of 1952. They wanted permanent work. A Sydney newspaper reported that in February 1953 they hooted and jeered the train at Spencer Street Station taking newly arrived migrants to short-term harvest work at Mildura.⁸ The Dutch baulked at jobs in the steelworks at Port Kembla. BHP had reached an agreement with the trade unions that displaced persons would only be offered jobs that Australians did not want to do. Assisted migrants, like the displaced persons before them, would be offered the dirtiest and the most arduous jobs. Heads of families from all nations baulked at railway and water supply construction and maintenance work that often took

place in remote areas. As there was only tent or shed accommodation in camps for employees, their dependants would have to be housed at holding centres, some of which were a long way away. Such jobs were fairly readily available, even in a recession, as the Australian-born were reluctant to accept them.

In general, the work offered at Bonegilla was viewed with distaste by the Greek community in Australia. Almost all of the pre-war Greek settlers were self-employed in the catering trades. They ran small businesses relying heavily on family labour. They worried whether their countrymen would take to jobs that were 'generally proletarian in character'.⁹ Young men might tolerate such work to get some money and a footing in the new country. But heads of families would not find it attractive. As one commentator has observed,

The place for Greek families was in urban centres with the bread winner, in a home and in the ethnic community. The tendency ... was to break the two-year contract, which could be done with impunity, and to settle in cities. Provided incoming assisted migrants had relatives and acquaintances in Australia they could avoid Bonegilla altogether.¹⁰



Greeks often preferred to be self-employed. A cartoonist in the London magazine *Krikos*, July-August 1957 thought Greeks commonly operated fruit and vegetable shops. He showed 'How the Greek migrant looks - to the Australian; to himself; and to the people back home', from Hugh Gilchrist, *Australians and Greeks* (3) *The Later Years*, p. 365.

Greek observers felt sorry for their compatriots who they saw arriving at Station Pier in Melbourne to be issued with yellow ICEM button indicators showing they were destined for Bonegilla.¹¹

Perhaps to indicate their independence, resourcefulness and/or self-reliance, many Greeks who arrived in post-war Australia unassisted still tell with some pride how they avoided Bonegilla.

Expressions of concern and criticism

The ICEM and the Greek Government were determined to see the Greek Farmer Project worked. Australian immigration authorities were cautiously optimistic that rural workers from Greece could be found employment even in the economic downturn of 1953. Not everybody, however, was sure that the project was going to work well, even at the outset.

In May 1953 members of the Democritus League, a Melbourne based Greek workers' club that had links with the Greek Communist Party, did not share the optimism of immigration authorities with regard to the demands of the labour market or the adequacy of the Bonegilla Reception and Training Centre.¹² In April the League had queried if Australia could absorb the large number of immigrant workers being admitted. It formed a Pan-Hellenic Relief, Unemployment and Sickness Committee to assist needy compatriots who had arrived unassisted. In May, shortly after the first party of fruit pickers had returned to Bonegilla and were waiting for jobs, the League dispatched an investigative group of three with a photographer to find out how they were faring. The League claimed it had received complaints about the difficulty the Greeks were having in getting jobs beyond the initial weeks of seasonal harvesting and about the food. Although the newly returned fruit pickers had been initially flush with cash, they now received only a few shillings once their tariff charges had been taken from their unemployment benefit. Bonegilla was boring with nothing but language classes to relieve the tedium. Ahead of the coming winter, the League was concerned that more recently arrived Greeks were poorly clothed and housed in unheated huts.

The delegation was intercepted by Centre officials who forbade them unauthorised entry. Special Branch of the Victorian Police and ASIO had been alerted to the proposed visit and were on-site. They were concerned about the links the Democritus League had with the Australian Communist Party. They alleged that the group spokesman, was 'a very active Communist' and the group travelled in a car that was owned by 'a well known Communist'. The League's interest in Bonegilla seemed to be political rather than charitable.

At their meeting with the delegation, Centre officials denied that there had been any complaints about food. However, they explained they could not always supply Greek food when the number to be served was small. No one was barred from going to seek work independently in Melbourne, provided they advised what they were about beforehand. The Centre would appreciate any assistance that the League might be able to give in locating any jobs in the Greek community. Similarly, while it was unaware that there were clothing problems, it would be pleased to distribute any clothing donated by the Greek community. Centre officials worried that the photographs the delegates were taking of poorly clothed Greeks without shoes would 'discredit this department'.

In June 1953 there was another public expression of concern about the welfare of Greeks at Bonegilla. Members of the League distributed pamphlets to a new group of Greek migrants as they disembarked in Melbourne. The pamphlets told the newcomers to expect 'tragic conditions' at Bonegilla, 'far away from any capital city'. The food was poor. There was no special provision for children or the sick. But even more importantly the government was 'not bound to find work for you'. They would only be offered short-term seasonal work or longer-term jobs that required them 'to carry weights or to chop wood'. Their immediate future was bleak. Further, they could expect little assistance from the Greek Consul.

YOU CAME HERE FOR WORK NOT TO GET THE
UNEMPLOYMENT ALLOWANCE.
DEMAND FROM THE GOVERNMENT AND FROM
THE GREEK CONSUL TO FIND YOU
IMMEDIATELY WORK.

In late July, there was yet another public expression of concern that grew, this time, from the wider Greek Community. Greeting the ships as he usually did, Dimitrius Papadakis, the First Secretary at the Greek Legation, was distressed to find that 300 Greeks arriving on two ships in late July did not have winter clothing. He embarked on a newspaper campaign to encourage the Greek communities in Melbourne and Sydney to donate footwear and warm clothing. He expressed concern about the 'military camp' where they would be housed and declared the food 'unacceptable'. Dimitri Lambros, the newly appointed Greek Minister who officially represented the Greek Government in Canberra, was embarrassed by the public appeal. He cabled his Government refuting the criticism of the reception centre. Bonegilla officials were embarrassed when it was showered with donations of blankets, footwear and clothing. The donations made them appear neglectful. The public might think the nation was unable to receive its immigrants appropriately.

Australia was particularly sensitive to overseas criticism that might impact on its migrant recruitment efforts. Denigration of the program and of Bonegilla caused unease in Greece as well as in the Greek Community in Australia. Harold Holt was challenged about conditions at Bonegilla when he visited Athens on his overseas migrant recruitment trip in June. The Minister was uncomfortable with harsh questioning in what could become a major migrant donor country. To the consternation of Heyes, the Secretary of the Department of Immigration, news of the July-August appeal was published in Alexandria under the heading 'The dreadful tragedy of 300 Greek immigrants in a miserable military camp in Australia'. Similar accounts appeared in a Cairo newspaper. Correspondence to the Australian legation in Cairo gave a different account of the reception and employment arrangements. If at all possible prospective migrants were not to be deterred from applying.¹³

Deploying the first 77 assisted Greek rural workers

In spite of the on-going economic recession and unease in the Australian Greek community, the ICEM Greek Project seemed to get off to a good start in that work was found fairly quickly for nearly all of the first party of 77.¹⁴

The single men were immediately dispatched to Mildura. Unemployment might be high, but the fruit industry still needed large numbers of temporary workers at harvest time. The Mildura Fruit Growers League was well organised and may, like other eager employers in more robust times, have arranged for recruiting agents to board the ship at Fremantle. The new arrivals had two days at Bonegilla, barely time to be registered and to sight their heavy luggage, before they were dispatched to work.

They caught the train to Melbourne, where they boarded a special train for Mildura, like that dissatisfied Italians had jeered a week or two before.

About eight weeks later they were back at Bonegilla, waiting for dispatch to more permanent employment. Nearly all were allocated work on a scatter of private properties in New South Wales and Victoria by the end of May. Six men did not wait for allocation to more permanent rural work, but instead found work with compatriots in cafes in New South Wales country towns. Those who had not secured rural work by the beginning of June were sent to Villawood from where they could labour in water, sewerage and drainage works, an Australian priority employment area.



Clockwise from the top:

Eleftherios Valmas and, Michail Kefallonitis were among the many men who moved to rural work after the fruit picking season of 1953.

Dimitrios Vavladelis and Konstantinos Alikoussis were among those who found work in country town cafes.

The Kaperonis family were the first Greek assisted migrants to stay on at the Reception Centre. When Loukas returned from working at Mildura, he was employed as a kitchen hand. He had been an Army cook and Bonegilla officials were always looking for people with skills in catering for large numbers. As staff, they were moved progressively to better accommodation, but Loukas was given kitchen duties in Block 5 and Block 22, where Greeks were housed. There he could prepare food in a Greek style. Both Loukas and Mary were respected by later Greek arrivals, because they were comparatively long resident and could offer advice in Greek. Loukas encouraged and trained many men to take on kitchen duties as that might help them find employment in catering. Mary was perceived as a leader among Greek women. On one occasion she delved into her precious supply of coffee brought from Greece to help prepare a funeral repast that might relieve the grief of a young couple who had lost an infant. After they left Bonegilla, Loukas eventually acquired the London Inn café in Albury and then a fish and chip shop at Tallangatta. Mary worked for the Veneris family at their Riverina Café in Albury for nearly twenty years.

Families were more difficult to place. Only two heads of families went fruit picking at Mildura with the single men. One, whose wife was pregnant, was given employment as a kitchen hand at Bonegilla on his return. He stayed there with his family to serve out his two-year contract. The other claimed illness on a return visit

to his family so that he could rejoin them at Bonegilla. That family was dispatched together to Scheyville Holding Centre 'pending allocation to employment'. One enterprising head of family independently produced assurances of approved work and accommodation in Brunswick and left a month after arrival.

Growing the ICEM Greek Farmer Project

The arrival of a total of four parties of Greek rural workers by July 1954 brought up the project target of 500. By then, the majority had not yet been distributed to workplaces, but pressure from Greece and favourable reports and encouraging economic forecasts led the Australian Government to extend the target by another 3 000 rural workers who might be employed in a variety of ways in Australia.¹⁵

In mid-1954 RG Dawson, the Director at Bonegilla reported encouraging employment figures and trends. The Greeks were not hesitant in taking up humble work such as clearing the land. The selection processes were working well. The Greeks were 'good physical types', 'pleasant people to handle' and 'well disposed'.

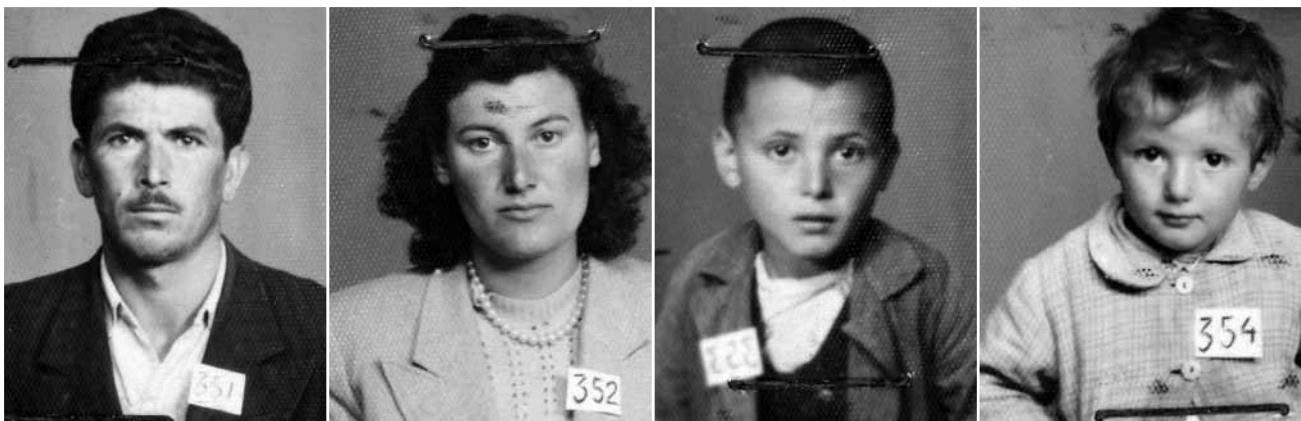
Dimitri Lambros visited Bonegilla and reported to and on behalf of the Greek Government. He suggested that Greek migrants might be better advised about the clothing to bring and about the possibilities of initial family separation. However, he was pleased to observe that, 'The constant efforts of Communists to bring the Greek migration programme into disrepute have failed so far'.¹⁶

Overall, he was complimentary about the accommodation and the reception arrangements:

Living conditions at Bonegilla are very satisfactory.

The accommodation is decent and comfortable: good clean rooms, separate recreation areas for children and adults, regular English lessons and lectures about Australian life are provided The food is good and plentiful [Hospital] treatment seems to be first class Migrants are absorbed very quickly into the employment market Conditions of employment for newcomers are exactly the same as for Australian citizens All the Greek migrants in the Centre, men, women and children who I had opportunity to speak with separately, are very happy.

A testimonial letter from one new arrival was produced to represent migrant satisfaction. Constandinos Vassilakopoulos wrote home reassuring his family that he had had difficulties with not knowing the language and with being temporarily separated from his family, but these were short-lived problems. Now he had a steady job at the Port Kembla steelworks and was renting a house. Australians were 'nice', 'kind' and 'understanding'. 'You cannot imagine our "swell" life here'.¹⁷



After a month at Bonegilla, Con Vassilakopoulos was sent to harvest sugar cane at Tumbulgum and his wife, Penelope, and their two children were placed at Greta Holding Centre. He was pleased to reunite with his family when he found work at Port Kembla and a private residence at nearby Primbee.

Deploying later parties of assisted Greek migrants

Later parties of Greeks were dispatched to jobs further afield than the initial intake of 77. Many went to South Australia. At the beginning of 1954 large numbers took on fruit harvesting at Berri, in South Australia's Upper Murray district and were later dispersed within South Australia. Some went direct to a variety of jobs including railway construction for the Commonwealth Government in South Australia. Arrangements were made for dependants in South Australian Holding Centres, particularly Woodside. Some were sent north to the sugar fields; their dependant wives and children were sent to holding centres at Greta in New South Wales or Enoggera in Queensland. Overall, however, more and more were

not sent to rural work. Some were sent directly to the hydro-electric works in Tasmania. Many were sent to Port Kembla steelworks.

The lack of accommodation places continued to impede the placement of families. Unlike the single migrants or childless couples, families were commonly spending three months at Bonegilla. This created reception centre accommodation pressures. Several were moved to Holding Centres 'pending allocation in rural employment'. Immigration authorities advised they would prefer to receive Greek migrants in small rather than large parties.¹⁸



Nikolas Caperonis and his family were sent directly to Port Kembla. Steelworkers stayed with their families in workers' hostels or found private accommodation nearby.



The Longinidis family was sent with others direct to Port Augusta where there was construction work with the Commonwealth Railways and temporary family accommodation.

The Kritsonis family and several others found private accommodation in Brunswick. Dimitrios took up work with the Victorian Railways at Newport Workshops.



After two months at Bonegilla, the Lambropoulos family and several others were moved from Bonegilla to make way for the arrival of a large party of 270 Greeks in June. Stavros stayed at the Villawood workers' hostel and worked with the Metropolitan Water Sewerage and Drainage Board, while his family went to Scheyville Holding Centre.

CHANGING THE ICEM GREEK PROJECT

Having decided to extend the ICEM Greek Project beyond its mid-1954 endpoint, the Australian Government moved at the end of 1954 to increase the intake of assisted Greek migrants even further in 1955 and the first half of 1956. By then, a larger overall migrant intake seemed justified: the Commonwealth Employment Service was reporting increased vacancies; the demand for labour was growing as the nation emerged from recession. The number of assisted and unassisted Greeks entering Australia fell away sharply after June 1956.

The Australian Government progressively refined and reshaped the scheme to meet its needs.¹⁹ It reached agreement with the Greek Government that it was not necessary to have a special entry scheme for victims of the series of disastrous earthquakes in the Aegean islands through 1953. The expanded scheme was likely to meet the needs of victims, who still had to meet eligibility tests. Australia became more specific about the kind of rural workers it wanted. Regional Employment Directors advised that Australia's greatest need was for men with experience in grape, rice and citrus farming and for tractor drivers, though other unskilled rural workers might be employed in railway or building construction. Encouragingly, the ICEM was adopting rigorous selection

processes in its search for rural workers with appropriate skills. The ICEM had also launched pre-embarkation language classes and some classes in tractor driving.

There was a shift in gender requirements. As there was still demand for domestics, Australia ventured, first, a trial intake of five, then, another trial intake of fifty single Greek women. It also opted to remove its emphasis on recruiting single workers and to take families as well. In effect this decision changed the project from its narrow rural worker manpower recruitment base to a much wider population-building migration program.

The ICEM 500 Greek Farmers Project opened the door to more general assisted and unassisted Greek migration. Already in November 1953 the *Skaubryn* had brought not only 49 single men, but also 44 families with 42 children and another four families nominated by resident Greeks. Even bigger parties of Greek families arrived in mid-1954. Through 1954 Bonegilla was bustling with one of its busiest years. Greta was opened as a supplementary reception centre and in December took in Greeks destined principally for the northern sugar fields. The constant flow of Greeks into Bonegilla continued into 1955 and 1956.



Increase in the numbers of Greek women and children provided a much missed family atmosphere to the reception centre. For Greeks Bonegilla became less of a masculine frontier town. Young men could now see compatriots enjoying familiar family outings and customs. There were school children with whom they might share a smile, a word, a Greek stamp or even a rabbit. (Vogiazopoulos).

Recreation officers and pre-school teachers found that Greek women were particularly protective of their children and would not always let them join activities or clubs they had arranged. 'This nationality,' one officer wrote, 'is very house-bound.'²⁰ That may have been so but Greek children found ways of mixing with other children. Athina Kourvisianos explained that her three-year-old daughter picked up German rather than English, for German was the language most commonly used in the playgrounds at Bonegilla.²¹

Beyond 1956 the pace of migration from Greece to Australia slowed to about 2 000 assisted and 4 000 unassisted each year. The bulk of Greek migrants were being sponsored by family members and friends who had already arrived. Only the assisted were housed at migrant accommodation places like Bonegilla. Still, there were fairly constant if much smaller flows of single men and families from Greece in and out of Bonegilla through the 1960s. In an increasingly diverse Bonegilla, Greek was but one of the thirteen languages spoken at the Reception Centre in the 1960s.

Deployment patterns

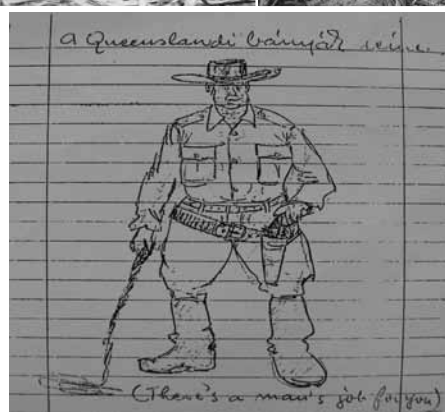
Several aspects of the deployment policies and practices used with the first assisted Greek migrant at Bonegilla set patterns that tended to prevail.

1. Rural work/ priority work.

There had been encouraging predictions that more migrant labour could be used in the rural sector. That is why Government had tentatively authorised the recruitment of the 500 Greek farmers during a recession. Still accommodation always posed a problem for rural workers, especially for families. Australia had other employment priorities and viewed the Greek rural workers as unskilled labour that might be diverted to its other areas of need, if it could not provide workplaces with accommodation on farms. Through 1953 and 1954, representatives of the Greek government protested about sending people who had been recruited as rural workers to manufacturing work in cities. Sometimes that work was arduous, unpleasant and even dangerous. The Australian Government insisted that it needed first to fill its priority areas. It specifically asked selection officers in 1954 to make plain that the work to which prospective migrants might be sent was not always related to their previous work.²² Many single Greek males were deployed to rural work in the mid-1950s. More and more were not.

Many migrants balked at rural work altogether. Farmers could be hard taskmasters; the work could be solitary; there was no ready protection from exploitation; shared accommodation often forced a strained employer/employee intimacy; remote locations made it difficult to socialise with friends or relatives. Financial incentives, particularly the lure of overtime, enticed migrants to take up arduous and unpleasant work in city factories or in remote areas. At Port Kembla steelworks, for example, employees received not only award wages, but also earned production bonuses for extra effort. There was the occasional prospect of working double shifts. Factory work was less popular when there was no opportunity of getting extra money.

The 1961 census returns showed there was a high concentration of Greeks in manufacturing occupations and under-representation in high status jobs. Further, 81 per cent of Greeks were living in metropolitan areas. Immigration authorities were quick to point out that they had not been deployed that way from Bonegilla. But as contracts were completed and as opportunities arose, most made their way to the cities and to non-rural jobs.



From the top: Greek rural workers were directed from Bonegilla to harvest work at Berri and to work in the dried fruit factory at Mildura. The accommodation for harvest workers was basic. (Vogiazopoulos).

Many went to sugar farms in Northern New South Wales and Queensland. Vogiazopoulos.

Some balked at work in Queensland. They thought it would be unbearably hot and they were scared of dangerous snakes. Sugar farm foremen were fierce.

Greek men, like George Tzikas, found work at Port Kembla steelworks, NAA A12111, 1/1957/16/90. Others, like Gabriel Gabriellidis, got construction work for the Hydro-electric Commission in Tasmania, A12111, 1/1958/16/116.

Greek rural workers were also sent to railway construction work, for example, in and near Port Augusta, South Australia, NAA A1200, L30386.

2. Separating families.

Australia had a shortage of houses, and it was not always possible to provide accommodation at or near a workplace. Bonegilla officers found it was much easier to distribute singles or even childless married couples than it was to find work places with family accommodation. Dependants, however, could be sent to a Holding Centre until the worker himself found alternative accommodation for them. Immigration authorities were well aware that Displaced Persons had objected strongly to family separation. They tried to minimise separation on humanitarian grounds. Further, and perhaps even more importantly for them, they found that separation had 'adverse effect up on efficiency and stability of workers' and it was also more expensive to maintain a person at

a Holding Centre than at Bonegilla.²³ Still, selection officers were advised they should assure prospective immigrants that separation was a temporary expedient. It was something that newly arrived families might have to endure.

Like the people from other non-British nations, the Greeks baulked at family separation.²⁴ Sometimes the Holding Centres were so far from the workplace, it was impossible for a worker to visit his family. Husbands and wives would try various ruses to be reunited. Many simply left their allocated jobs and Holding Centre accommodation and went their own way - absent without leave.



Ioannis Letzepis accepted short term harvesting work at Berri. His family went to Woodside Holding Centre.



Bonegilla was primarily used as a reception centre, but, when space permitted in 1956, Block 15 was used as a Holding Centre, accommodating the dependants of workers who were working elsewhere and had been unable to find family accommodation near their workplace. There was a mix of nationalities in Block 15, including Greeks, such as Mrs Adamantia Lantzakis and her children. (Vogiazopoulos).

3. Making their own way.

Perhaps more than any immigrant group, the Greeks seemed to have the entrepreneurial capacity and/or family and friend connections to find their own way. This irked employment authorities who saw the chief advantages of the post-war immigration program as providing a source of directable and controllable labour. By mid-1954 they were expressing dismay that some Greeks proved difficult to direct or control. Internal memos complained that some Greeks were prepared to risk losing their social security support rather than go to Queensland sugar fields. Some refused the heavy duties allocated to them at Port Kembla steelworks. Some simply failed to report to the jobs they had been allocated and just disappeared. Others made their own work and housing arrangements without informing the employment office. The Reception Director complained in October 1954 that 177 had simply caught trains to Melbourne or Sydney instead of moving to their allocated jobs. In September 1955, 98 out of 800 new arrivals had sufficient money within three days to leave Bonegilla and return to Melbourne without waiting for a job allocation. They seemed, he thought, to be 'well organised'. The cards of all absconders were marked 'AWL', and their unclaimed heavy luggage was put into storage, but there was no determined push to trace them or to ensure that they did fulfil their contractual obligation of serving two years in allocated employment.²⁵

4. Language Problems.

Nearly all work was language dependent. The first party of assisted Greeks found that their lack of English language skills impeded their employment opportunities. They found they could harvest fruit without English, but other employers expected them to have some English even for labouring jobs. Like those that followed them, they quickly learned the Bonegilla mantra, 'No English, no job'. They were perhaps fortunate in having a comparatively large number of compatriots already resident who could provide assistance, but their linguistic disadvantage limited their social networks for finding jobs and houses.

The language instructors at Bonegilla found Greeks presented particular challenges. They did not start from a similar base to that of other non-English speakers, in that they did not share the same alphabet with English. In addition, many Greek rural workers were not literate in their own language. The instructors found they had to teach Greeks separately, whereas they usually mixed national groups within the same classes. While they provided all other nationalities with one two-hour lesson daily, they had to give Greeks two two-hour lessons – one in the morning and one in the afternoon. More often than not, Greeks needed more than just three or four weeks of language tuition.²⁶

Greeks had trouble with English and Australians had trouble with Greek:

Bonegilla officers were provided with a training

document that explained variants in the names of European migrants and made suggestions on how they might be anglicised to 'increase our efficiency'. In Australia, the training document suggested, Petros would become Peter, Stavros Steve, Andonios Tony, Konstandinos Con, Vasilios Bill; Ekaterini Cathy, Frideriki Freda, Varvara Barbara and Fotini Lucy.

It was left to the Red Cross to supply a list of Greek phrases to be distributed to country and metropolitan hospitals dealing with midwifery cases.

5. Jobs for women.

As early as June 1953, Dimitri Lambros, found that Greek women insisted on being considered for jobs. Childless couples, in particular, looked for ways to supplement the meagre family incomes attached to unskilled work. Quite quickly it became common for married migrant women to break with customary Greek practice and seek work to supplement the family income. The numbers involved also proved a break with general Australian employment patterns: in 1961 32 per cent of married migrant women were in the paid workforce; this was in contrast with 15 per cent of Australian married women. A survey in Victoria found that 48 per cent of Greek wives were working.²⁷

Australia tried to encourage single Greek women to come as domestics. However, the women found after arrival that they could earn more money doing factory work.

6. Jobs at Bonegilla.

The Reception Centre itself kept recruiting migrant labour. Most of the Greeks were initially employed as kitchen hands. Couples avoided separation by staying at Bonegilla. There was always the prospect of their both getting jobs. Public Service conditions applied. The award wages were modest, but overtime was generally possible. Living expenses were not high and the accommodation provided was probably similar to that available elsewhere at a similar cost. Camaraderie developed between peoples from different nations in similar circumstances in a new country. Unlike a lot of other unskilled work, the work at the reception centre seemed to be meaningful. The Centre was aimed at receiving and dispersing new arrivals; migrant staff might well empathize with those going through experiences that they themselves had recently encountered.

Inspecting Bonegilla for a magazine story in 1961, Desmond O'Grady, a journalist, commented favourably on the high proportion of migrants in the workforce at Bonegilla and recorded some of their stories of satisfaction. Providing them with work at the reception centre seemed to meet the needs of both the Immigration Department and the migrants themselves. Further, he suggested, 'You could take the migrant staff as shining examples of integration'.²⁸



Staff had access to a Staff Club that was licensed and organised dances, balls and other functions. A live orchestra of migrant musicians entertained on Friday nights. (Lyras and Vogiazopoulos collections).



Transients used a YWCA hut for recreation. There they could have light refreshments and play cards, table tennis and games. They could also listen to familiar music from their native land played on a gramophone. NAA A12111, 1/1955/22/119.

From Bonegilla, then, many Greeks were directed to heavy industry, public utilities, rural labouring and menial domestic and hospital work. Members of the host society read such deployment differently from the way the migrants read it. Arthur Monk, the President of the ACTU, told an Australian Citizenship Convention in 1958:

The introduction of the migrant worker at the bottom of the ladder often meant promotion or upgrading for Australian workers and relieved them of the necessity to seek employment in remote areas or of an arduous character.²⁹

An observer of Greek migration noted:

The fifties and sixties, when so many of the Greeks arrived, was a period when it was possible to work hard, to save, to gradually improve one's accommodation and to accumulate some of the trappings of a high standard of living. At the same time it was for many Greeks a period characterised by long hours of unpleasant and physically demand work, of both parents working and of a feeling of being looked down upon by many of the Australian-born.³⁰

HOST SOCIETY RESPONSES TO THE GROWING GREEK PRESENCE

For immigration authorities the measures of success of the ICEM Greek Project were primarily based on the employability of the newcomers, but government also needed to know 'how [Greek migrants] are settling in and whether there is any unfavourable reaction to them'.³¹ They seemed pleased with the contribution Greeks were making to the economic welfare of the nation, but they found they had to give attention to several matters of community concern. Some in the host nation were anxious about the way Greeks clustered into inner city suburbs and formed community networks and were retaining their distinctive language, church and customs. Some worried about the gender balance of the Greek migrant intake. As the population grew rapidly and became more diverse through the 1950s and 1960s, there were shifts in thinking about cultural diversity and changes to the immigration program related to the non-British and to Bonegilla.

Concerns about residential clustering

Not surprisingly Greeks figured prominently in surveys of residential disadvantage. From the very beginnings of the program in 1947, there had been concern about immigrant groups forming enclaves. In 1953 the *Sydney Morning Herald* had welcomed the notion of continuing the immigration program, but recommended a 'healthy distribution' of migrants throughout the community. Residential dispersal was indicative of social integration. In 1954, the *Melbourne Argus* reported with dismay on 21 Greeks 'living like sardines' in a small six-bedroom house in Brunswick. Unassisted Greeks, it seemed, had few resources and tended to cluster together in sub-standard houses in inner city suburbs. In 1958 the Immigration Planning Council received report that a high proportion of Greek immigrants were living in sub-standard inner city residences. A review in 1959 concluded that migrants were not as satisfactorily housed as the community generally, but there was some hope that their position was improving.³² The 1961 Census confirmed that 81 per cent of Greeks were living in metropolitan areas.

Immigration authorities kept track of the residential distribution of migrants, but government had no real controls it could exercise. Gorman, an honorary consul in Melbourne, expressed dismay that so many Greek rural workers were taking up city jobs and living in unsatisfactory housing. He was told that was not where they had been originally placed from Bonegilla.³³ After they left Bonegilla, they were left entirely to their own resources.

For the new settlers the support of compatriots was crucial to their well being. They sought the networking they needed in inner-city neighbourhoods. Together they could re-establish familiarities of daily life through diet, language, religion.

The Greek population in Melbourne was working to build what was probably the most comprehensive

network of ethnic institutions to be found in any ethnic group in Australia. Greek Orthodox churches, community schools, regional associations, sporting clubs, theatres, dancehalls and restaurants opened in large numbers making it possible for those who chose to live out almost every aspect of their life in a Greek environment to do so.³⁴

Charles Price, an immigration scholar, tried to increase community understanding of Southern European migrants. He pointed out that the very word 'diaspora' was Greek and produced a detailed study of pre-war immigration tracing chain migration patterns of earlier years. Greeks, he said, sought each other out and lived in separate communities, as they always had in Australia and in other countries. Abroad, as at home they relied heavily on family and regional networks. He explained, with fellow scholar Mike Tsounis, that Greeks established strong ethnic community or paroikia supports. Hence, they tended to reside in closely networked neighbourhoods. Unlike pre-war Greek migrants, the post-war arrivals were more likely to be from the mainland rather than the islands. They included northern Greeks, people from the Peloponnese and Greeks from Egypt, Turkey and Cyprus. There were regional variations in Greek culture, as regional fraternities seemed to indicate, but, he suggested, nearly all Greeks had a sense of a golden heroic past and proud traditions. It would not be surprising to find Greek migrants 'turning again to the tor of peasant pioneers, [to] catch the occasional reflection of gold and beauty in their own patient struggles and achievements.' Assimilation, he warned, would be slow, even multi-generational.³⁵

Addressing gender imbalance

Prior to 1956 Greeks had been nominating as many as 14 000 fellow Greeks as migrants people per year. But from mid-1956 restrictions were placed on the categories of people resident Southern Europeans could nominate. The number of Greek nominees fell to about 4 000 each year and did not increase until the restrictions were lifted in 1965 permitting sponsors to nominate people beyond their immediate family. The focus was often on sponsoring wives, fiancées sisters, nieces, female cousins and single unrelated females.

Newspapers were amused by the way police were called to restrain the noisy greetings given bride ships arriving with brides-to-be.³⁶ From 1956 to 1959, Greeks brought out three times as many females as males. Immigration planners noted with approval that the number of marriageable Greek females was beginning to move towards matching the number of marriageable males by the beginning of the 1960s. In the latter half of the 1960s special efforts were made to facilitate the flow of unaccompanied single Greek females to ensure the gender balance of Greeks in Australia was even.³⁷

Single assisted Greek women were usually directed to single-sex hostels, sometimes conducted by the Salvation Army and sometimes by the YWCA hostels, rather than to Bonegilla. Immigration authorities worried that single women were 'difficult to supervise' in mixed migrant accommodation places. The alternative arrangements would 'give the girls a feeling of security and guardianship which is particularly desirable during their first days in Australia [They] would give more adequate "protection" for those girls who desired some escape from the often overwhelming attention of their male compatriots'.³⁸

Single Greek women may have rarely appeared at Bonegilla. Their absence points to the masculine nature of the Reception Centre. It was to redress the gender imbalance established in the early years of assisted Greek migration through Bonegilla that Government tried to entice single Greek women to Australia in the late 1950s and in the 1960s. The ICEM conducted pre-embarkation domestic service training courses in the mid-1960s.

Single Greek women, nominated by Greek settlers already in Australia, arrived by air. They were described as 'domestics, fiancées, sisters and dependants', NAA A12111, 1/1962/4/76.



In a subsequent drive for more single women, a publicist pointed out the differences Vassiliki Daflou faced as a domestic by showing her collecting firewood and washing in Epiros, in North-west Greece near the Albanian border, before she learned how to use Australian domestic appliances. The publicist explained that she had been sent to work as a domestic in a hospital and boarded with a Greek family, NAA A12111, 1/1962/4/45, 1/1962/4/46 and 1/1962/4/47

Shifts in thinking about cultural diversity

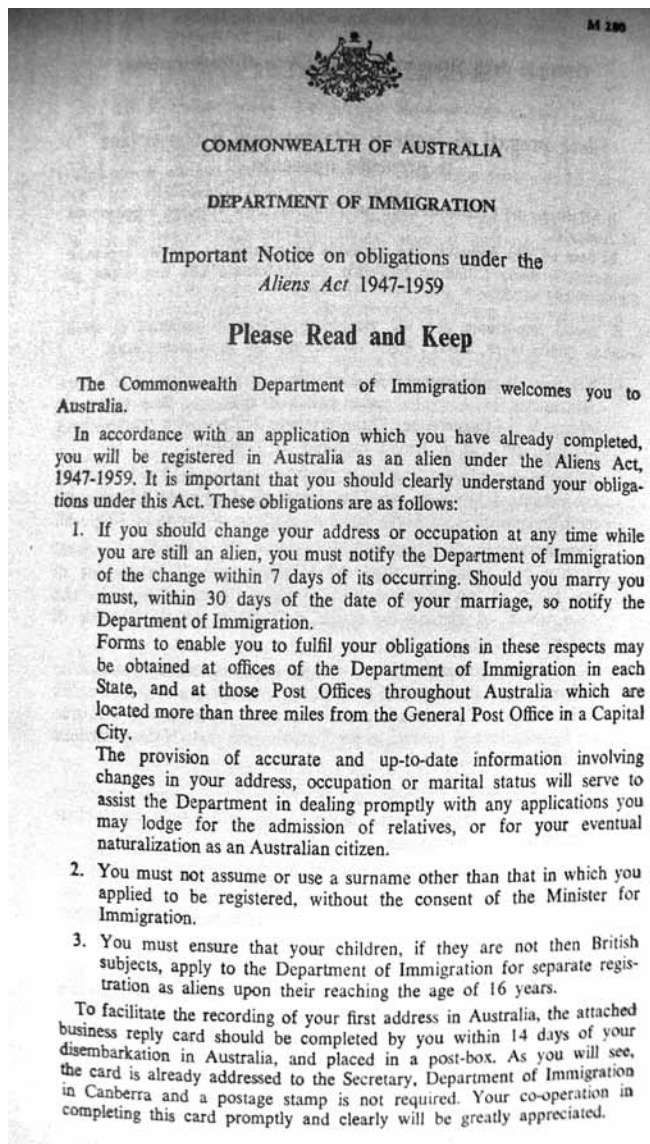
The Australian population was growing rapidly and, indeed, doubled between 1947 and 1971, the years in which Bonegilla was operating. Many in the host society were apprehensive, not only about the rapid growth, but also about the increased diversity. Half of the population growth was attributed to immigration, and about half of the immigrants were non-British. Government constantly tried to reassure people that the nation could absorb the new arrivals, including the 'aliens; who seemed to cause most anxiety. It reassured the Australian population that the Department of Immigration was keeping a balance between the number of the numbers of British and non-British migrants. It was also trying to balance the numbers of different nationalities from various parts of Europe. An energetic 'Bring out a Briton' campaign got under way in 1957. A planning document in 1956 ventured the view that Hungary and the Netherlands were the most preferred non-British migrant sources and Switzerland, the USA, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark were other excellent sources.³⁹ Southern Europeans, including Greeks, did not sit high in what was plainly a hierarchy of preference.

Unlike British migrants, the non-British had to agree to work as directed for two years and knew that little or no heed would be taken of their skills, interests or qualifications. They were expected to accept rudimentary accommodation at Bonegilla that was below the standard set for British hostels. They were expected to accept the separation of breadwinners from dependants, if there were no family accommodation available near a workplace. They had to sign contracts saying they would learn English and were expected to substitute English for their native language as soon as possible. As non-British aliens, they would not qualify for full privileges and obligations of a citizen. They were obliged to register their presence in the country and to report every house move, change of job or change of name. They could not secure permanent employment in the public service. They could not expect to get for many years the same level of government support with housing and pension payments that the native-born or the British received.

Southern Europeans were discriminated against further in that at least temporarily in 1956 restrictions were placed on the kinds of people they could nominate to come to Australia. One commentator has said Greeks were not being treated fairly.

Australian society ... discriminated against Greek immigrants, relegating them to an inferior social position. It was sometimes a hostile society, intolerant and xenophobic, not philoxenic (hospitable) as Greeks would have it.⁴⁰

Some in the host society never reached far beyond the notion that the 'reffos', 'DPs' or 'Balts' of the Displaced Persons era had been succeeded by 'dagos' and 'wogs', who were similarly language deficient. They found it hard to understand why New Australians could be so ungrateful as not to want to naturalize as soon as possible.⁴¹ Others enjoyed the notion of living in or



All non-British migrants were classified as aliens and were required to notify changes of address or occupation and to apply for permission to change name, c.1965. These forms and the instructions related to them were issued at Bonegilla.

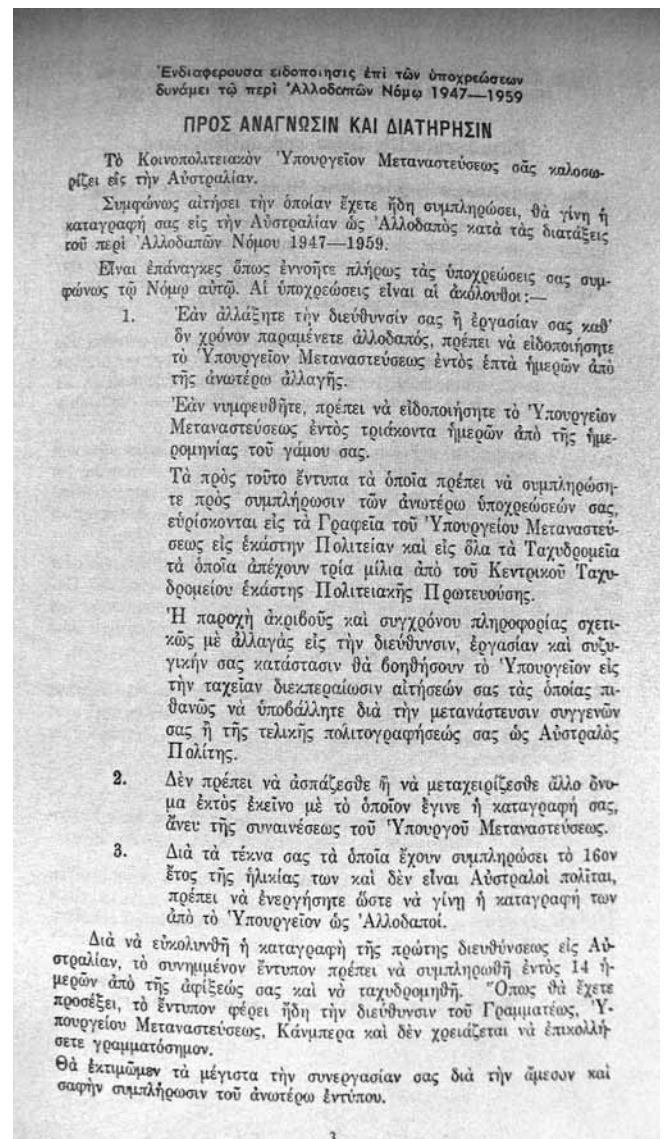
near places that had become 'cosmopolitan' and held the promise of continental music and cuisine. Still others noted that the Greeks were stayers: there were very few Greeks amongst what seemed to be increasing numbers of migrant departures in the 1960s. Greeks were stayers and battlers, prepared to do it tough.

The answers to questions about the Greek experience of Australia and the Australian experience of Greek migrants were to be found well beyond Bonegilla. They are tangential to stories of Bonegilla, but they do colour Greek perceptions and subsequent recall of the Reception Centre, particularly as they conjure up senses of opportunity and/ or disadvantage.

Changes in receiving migrants at Bonegilla Improving fabric and surrounds

An uncommonly large party of 140 Greeks, arriving by the *Patris* in 1966, would have found a different Reception Centre from that the first Greek rural workers encountered in 1953.⁴²

Things began to change for the better at Bonegilla from



about 1956, at the end of the initial ICEM Greek Project. The Department of Immigration had become more interested in attracting workers with skills rather than just labourers and domestics. It thought that those with skills were likely to have a family. Accordingly, it set about 'providing more of a family atmosphere' at Bonegilla. Catering arrangements changed. Kitchens were provided with new equipment such as electric stoves, electric stockpots and deep fat fryers. The messes were equipped with small family-sized tables and tubular steel chairs. Diners were more likely to get familiar national dishes, as approval had been won to separate migrants from the same country into the same block. So, for example, the Greeks were segregated from the Dutch. Centre officials still maintained it was more important to have cooks experienced in catering for large numbers than to have those who were able to prepare national dishes. But now some thought was given to the different tastes of the Greeks, the Dutch, the Hungarians, the Germans and the Italians who occupied the Centre. Segregation by block also overcame problems of co-locating those who queried the 'questionable habits' of people from a different nationality.⁴³

Further improvements were ahead. In the early 1960s the site was consolidated and buildings renovated. The seven-day menu gave way to a more varied 28-day schedule of meals. Accommodation cubicles were provided with strip radiators, floor coverings, curtains and better furnishings including nine-inch inner spring mattresses. After 1964 the Centre was managed by senior public servants rather than ex-servicemen. Publicists boasted in 1965:

The first settlers in the post-war period would find it hard to recognise the centre now. Stark outlines have gone for today there are some 15 000 trees, both Australian and European. Banks, churches, a school, hospital and leisure centre are among the facilities provided at Bonegilla. The food is simple and wholesome, with special menus for children.⁴⁴

Shifts in migrant intakes and deployment

By 1959 immigration authorities had dispensed with the contract system that obliged assisted migrants to work as directed for two years. They believed that skilled people could be deterred from coming if they were legally liable to return two years of service in a directed employment that was most likely to be unskilled. Instead, assisted migrants now signed an undertaking: they agreed to stay in Australia for two years and to try to learn English, otherwise they would repay the transport costs the Australian Government had contributed.

During the 1960s Bonegilla officers reported that the new arrivals generally had more skills, money and luggage. They were better dressed, arrived in small parties by air, found their own private accommodation more readily and often their own jobs, more often than not in the metropolitan capitals, where their own ethnic groups were available to lend support. Employment officers, dealing with smaller numbers, found they could now spend more time ascertaining and trying to meet individual needs.⁴⁵ In its final years Bonegilla was prepared to admit unassisted as well as assisted migrants to provide temporary arrival accommodation. Perhaps those who arrived as unassisted nominees had more resources than those who qualified for ICEM and Government assistance.

It is difficult to find out if such observations held true for the Greek migrants of the 1960s. The Bonegilla cards seem to indicate that Greeks were still unskilled and were being placed in unskilled work. They were still being dispatched to fruit picking in 1968 and families were still difficult to place. At least some Greeks arrivals in the 1960s had the problems of having insufficient means and inadequate clothing.⁴⁶ There was a big boost in the number of Greek arrivals after 1965 when sponsorship restrictions were lifted and Southern Europeans, like Northern Europeans, could sponsor people beyond their immediate family. Sponsors were to give assurances of accommodation and jobs.

Adjusting migrant education

Perhaps the most important change at Bonegilla was in the name of the place. It had been known variously as simply a migrant accommodation centre or a

Commonwealth Immigration Centre. More specifically it was called the 'Bonegilla Reception and Training Centre'. About 1959 the title was contracted to 'Bonegilla Reception Centre'. This change in terminology was indicative of shifts in immigration and settlement policy.



(Vogiazopoulos)

Australian scholars of immigration argue that assimilation was a transition policy that 'allowed Australians to make sense of, contain and ultimately accept social and cultural change by gradually, if equivocally, incorporating the reality of an ethnically mixed population into popular conceptions of the Australian nation'.⁴⁷ Bonegilla was, in that sense, not so much about training the newcomers, as reassuring Australians that proper care was being taken to see that the newcomers would adjust to the host society's ways. The non-British newcomers would receive instruction in basic English, civics and Australian ways. They were adjust, adapt and be absorbed.⁴⁸

'Training' was lost from the centre name by the 1960s, but migrant education continued. Formal language and civics lessons were still given and the pedagogy may not have changed greatly, other than the more frequent use of motion film. But the focus of training was changing. It was acknowledged that non-English speakers, especially Greek migrants, required up to 24 months of language tuition, rather than 3 or 4 weeks to achieve competence. Classes were re-organised to embrace pre-embarkation, shipboard, Centre and post-Centre tuition. At the Centre language instructors stressed the post-Centre access to community or workplace based instruction and to radio broadcast lessons.



The newly equipped Film and Study Centre had air-conditioned classrooms and a library with a rich range of books, magazines, newspapers and films. It still presented a grim exterior in its bare surrounds. (Lyrras)

Bonegilla was still about preparing newcomers for life in Australia. But it was no longer training people to be Australians. Within government the term 'integration' was displacing 'assimilation'. As in the USA the term 'melting pot' was making way for 'salad bowl'. New arrivals might not be expected to discard their cultural pasts immediately, though they would in the long-term. Newcomers in the 1960s were being helped to join the communities where they were to be placed, rather than being instructed or trained in what they had to do.

Bonegilla's approach to what was called 'assimilation' was based on community engagement. All residents were encouraged to mix with the varying nationalities at the Centre and also with Australians. A succession of Reception Centre directors actively encouraged newcomers to engage with the local community and the local community to engage with the migrants. In the 1950s the Reception Centre had tried to woo community support for migration with displays of cultural artefacts, folk choirs and traditional dance. During the 1960s assimilation activities were much more likely to take place on the football field, the basketball court or at the table tennis tournament than in a concert hall or exhibition gallery. A hotly contested nil all football game in 1959 had Major Kershaw, the acting Director, beside himself: 'Here', he declared, 'was assimilation at its best'. Basketball, too, he added, was 'playing a most important part in promoting good relations between Centre teams and those from the neighbouring districts'.⁴⁹ Greek men participated in those sporting competitions.

Directors Guinn and Carroll were forever welcoming the connections made by local women's church groups and service clubs: they 'go a long way towards assisting newcomers to settle happily in the community'.⁵⁰ It was through the CWA sharing a cup of teas with sultana cake or scones 'at their place and ours' that migrant women of all nationalities were made to feel welcome, and less strange. Mutual respect was based on exchanges of recipes and a sharing of common child and family care experiences. Greek women participated in those exchanges.⁵¹

Beyond 1971

By the time Bonegilla closed at the end of 1971, Australia had become an immigrant country. One in five of the population was reckoned as being overseas-born, and the Minister for Immigration pointed out that Greeks were the third largest post-war migrant group.⁵²

Australia was moving from a policy of assimilation to integration. Indeed, it was on the eve of declaring itself a multicultural nation. In more recent times there have been moves away from earlier policies of multiculturalism towards policies to facilitate social cohesion. Nowadays, researchers tapping how migrants feel about their arrival and settlement experiences ask them about whether they found meaningful work, how they viewed their economic prospects, whether they participated in community

organisations, whether they experienced discrimination. The researchers look to departure, naturalisation and inter-marriage rates as key indicators of the success of the immigration program.⁵³ Similar considerations must guide any attempt to assess the impact of post-war Greek migration on Australia and Australia on post-war Greek migrants. Departure rates, job market segmentation and naturalisation were immediate concerns related to the first generation of migrants. Unlike some from other nationalities, the Greeks rarely left once they had arrived. By the second generation they were in a wide variety of professions, trades and businesses. Inter-marriage was slower to decline: Greeks tended to marry Greeks. By the second generations about half were marrying 'in' and half 'out'. By the third generation 82 per cent of Greek males and 77 per cent of Greek females had a spouse of different ancestry.⁵⁴ Such trends are used to indicate social inclusion.

Since 1971 Australia has continued to be an immigrant country. Nowadays about 44 per cent of the population has been born overseas or has at least one parent who was. One in seven reports that they speak a language other than English at home. Greek is one of the six most common of those languages. Four per cent of the population proudly claim Greek ancestry. Many of them have a forebear or know of a forebear's patron who came via Bonegilla.

Endnotes

The statistics and their interpretation on the inside cover are drawn from various sources including MS Tsounis, 'Greek Communities in Australia', PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, 1971.

¹ See for example *BMM (Border Morning Mail)* 30 May 1952 and *Canberra Times* 20 March 1953.

² See for example *BMM* 10 April 1953.

³ *SMH* 2 September, *Canberra Times* 3 September, *Age* 3 September, *West Australian* 5 September 1949.

⁴ *SMH* 19 July 1952; *Age* 22 July 1952.

⁵ *Transplanting the Agora*, p.162.

⁶ NAA A1838, 80/1/3/2 PART 1, Holt 24 July 1952.

⁷ J Jupp, *Arrivals and Departures*, Cheshire Lansdowne, 1966, p.29.

⁸ Thompson, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* 25 February 1953, p.277.

⁹ J Collins, *Migrant Hands in a Distant Land*, p.23

¹⁰ M P Tsounis, 'Greek Communities in Australia', PhD thesis University of Adelaide, 1971, p.351.

¹¹ Efthimios Kondos quoted in George Kanarakis ed. *Greek Voices in Australia*, ANU, Canberra 1988, pp.260-262.

¹² For the following see NAA MP 1139/1, 53/38/1368 and Con K Allimonos, 'Greek Communist Activity in Melbourne: A Brief History', *Labour History* 86.

¹³ Correspondence 26 July; 5, 24 August and 15 October 1953, A445, 197/1/9.

¹⁴ For the details of deployment following see individual Bonegilla Cards, National Archives of Australia.

¹⁵ Reports 16 November 1953, 14 and 18 July 1953, NAA A445, 197/1/9.

¹⁶ Report of Bonegilla inspection, D Lambros, 18 July 1953, A445, 197/1/9.

¹⁷ Copy of letter 20 October 1953 enclosed with report 16 November 1953, NAA A445, 197/1/9.

¹⁸ Memos, 21 and 29 October, 30 November 1953; 19 January and 2 December 1954, A445, 197/1/9.

¹⁹ For what follows see decisions detailed in reports 21 and 29 October, 5 December 1953; 19 January and 2 December 1954, NAA A445, 197/1/9.

²⁰ Creative Leisure Centre Report 12 August 1969; Pre-school staff development notes A2567, 1960/63/1.

²¹ *Border Morning Mail* 16 May 1957.

²² Internal correspondence 19 January 1954 and correspondence with Dimitri Lambros, 30 November 1954, A445, 197/1/9.

²³ Papers presented to IAC meetings, 17 September and 27 November 1953.

²⁴ *SMH* 26 July 1954, p.5; Dawson, Director, report 14 July 1953, NAA A445/1, 197/1/9.

²⁵ Internal teleprinter messages, 23 July 1953, 15 July, 20 July, 23 July and 27 July 1954, MP 275/1, 1953/2293; Guinn correspondence, 12 October 1954, 22 February and 7 September 1955, NAA A446, 1962/65554.

²⁶ Bonegilla Education Officer, 29 May 1953 and 7 December 1954, A445, 220/14/25.

²⁷ Report Jane Wasman, NAA A2567, 1960/63/1.

²⁸ *Bulletin* 11 November 1961.

²⁹ Quoted in Stephen Castles, ADD TITLE p.54.

³⁰ Christabel Young et al, *Report on Greek and Italian Youth Employment Study*, Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, AGPS Canberra, 1983. p.4.

³¹ *Canberra Times* 24 November 1954. Internal report, 2 December 1954, A445, 197/1/9.

³² *SMH* 22 January 1953; *Argus* 14 December 1954; Report to the Immigration Planning Council, 4 August 1959, NAA A10875/1959.

³³ Correspondence November 1954, A445, 197/1/9.

³⁴ Christabel Young et al, *Report on Greek and Italian Youth Employment Study*, Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, AGPS Canberra, 1983, p.15.

³⁵ C A Price, *Southern Europeans in Australia*, OUP, Melbourne, 1963, p.235. See also 'Need for sympathetic approach to new migrants' difficulties', *Canberra Times* 10 November 1954 and 'Migrants defended on slum living', *SMH* 17 August 1960.

³⁶ For example, *Melbourne Herald* 1 January 1957; *SMH* 14 April and 9 August 1958; 20 January 1960, 30 July 1961.

³⁷ 'Immigration and Balance of the Sexes', Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers (37), 1970.

³⁸ Memo detailing reception arrangements for single Greek girls, 9 August 1963, NAA A446, 1969/72282. Also NAA A2567, 1962/5 confirms that unattached females were sent to capital cities.

³⁹ Report of Justice Dovey to Immigration Advisory Council Meeting 25-26 October 1956.

⁴⁰ M Tsounis, 'Greek Communities in Australia' in CA Price ed. *Greeks in Australia*, p.47.

⁴¹ *SMH* 6 March 1961.

⁴² *Border Morning Mail* 23 June 1966.

⁴³ *Good Neighbour* June 1956; Internal memos 21 August and 21 November 1956, A2567/1/ 1956

⁴⁴ A12111, 1/1965/22/17.

⁴⁵ Pat Smith to Glenda Sluga, quoted in G Sluga, 'Bonegilla Reception and Training Centre, 1947-1971, MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 1985, p.174.

⁴⁶ Correspondence from the ICEM, 17 August 1966 and CES reports 18 December 1967 and 23 January 1968, NAA A2567, 1960/162.

⁴⁷ Gwenda Tavan *Australian Historical Studies*, 1997 p.80. see also Anna Haebich, *Spinning the Dream*, Freemantle Press, Freemantle, 2007.

⁴⁸ NAA A445, 175/7/17.

⁴⁹ Kershaw to Secretary Department of Immigration 10 August 1959.

⁵⁰ J Carroll, Director, 6 December 1966, NAA A2567, 1961/69.

⁵¹ *Border Morning Mail* 16 May 1957.

⁵² Minister Press Release, NAA A2567, 1970/86B.

⁵³ Andrew Markus ed. *Mapping Social Cohesion*, Monash University, 2008.

⁵⁴ 'Most migrants marry out by the third generation', *Australian* 8 July 2004.

REMEMBERING AND RE-IMAGINING ASSISTED GREEK MIGRANT EXPERIENCES

The Greek migrants who entered Australia via Bonegilla and those they sponsored to follow them have been active in creating a commemorative centre at Block 19 Bonegilla. Many attended Bonegilla reunions or festivals in 1987, 1997, 1999, 2006 and 2007 and /or Greek reunions and celebrations of the site in 1991, 2003, 2008 and 2010.



From the top: John Pandazopoulos declares Block 19 open as a commemorative centre and visitor venue in 2006. He was Minister for Tourism in the Bracks' Government and had won \$2million for the project. Greek community representatives pose before a wall of faces in 2006. Buses brought Greek pilgrims from Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Canberra to mark the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the first assisted Greeks in 1953. Greek pilgrims view the huts in 2003. Zac Vogiazopoulos stands in front of the former Cinema with Tasos Kolokotronis. Alek Lyras poses with his Bonegilla blanket outside a hut. Theo Emmanouilidis, carrying the suitcase he made to bring to Australia, re-enacts arriving at Bonegilla.

Memories of the Reception Centre vary. So do ideas about what it stands for and how it should be commemorated. For some the bleak huts 'in the middle of nowhere' indicate the kind of hardships endured by those Greeks who pioneered the post-war settlement of Australia. For others the site brings back memories of youthful confidence in seeking out opportunity in a new country. Some recall the good company and good cheer of people in a similar situation: that camaraderie and support helped them through the difficulties of dislocation and re-location. The following miscellany illustrates the points made elsewhere about arrival and early work experiences. A brief attempt is made to explain how the people quoted position themselves in relation to Bonegilla and/or Greek migration more generally.

The long-resident

For most Greeks, Bonegilla was a footfall. For those who stayed and worked at the Centre, sometimes for the duration of their two-year contract, and sometimes even longer, Bonegilla was a landfall. Many have deep and even fond memories of their life there.

Zac Vogiazopoulos arrived at Bonegilla in October 1953. Coming from Northern Greece he had developed language skills in Slav languages to which he added Italian, German and English during the Occupations and Civil War. As a journalist in Salonica, Vogiazopoulos had expressed enthusiasm for a migration arrangement between Greece and Australia. The ICEM hired him as an ICEM escort to accompany Greek migrants to Australia. Initially he was employed at Bonegilla as a boiler attendant, because he had as a youth worked in a bakery and knew how to tend wood-fired boilers. His language skills and the people management skills he had acquired as an Air Force officer attracted the attention of Bonegilla officials. He was appointed as an interpreter and finally a Supervisor for Block 5, where most of the Greek migrants were accommodated. As Block Supervisor he was 'the first port of call' for migrants seeking assistance. He had to deal with a variety of newcomer problems related, for example, to unclean toilets, broken water pipes or gutters, sick children, noisy neighbors, employment, family separation and even marital difficulties.

Prompted to record something of his time at Bonegilla, he produced a book which was published in 2007. For him, Bonegilla was important enough to Greeks for the book to be published in Greek. It is an account of the Greek Diaspora that he sets in the context of Cold War tensions and recounts through the stories of individuals and their families. It tells of the assistance provided within the Reception Centre to help new arrivals make sense of their surrounds and situation. He defends the Centre against various criticisms and is particularly sensitive to the charge that it was a concentration camp. No one was forced to stay. People could go as they pleased. It was misleading to speak of 'escape'. The book follows several work stories.

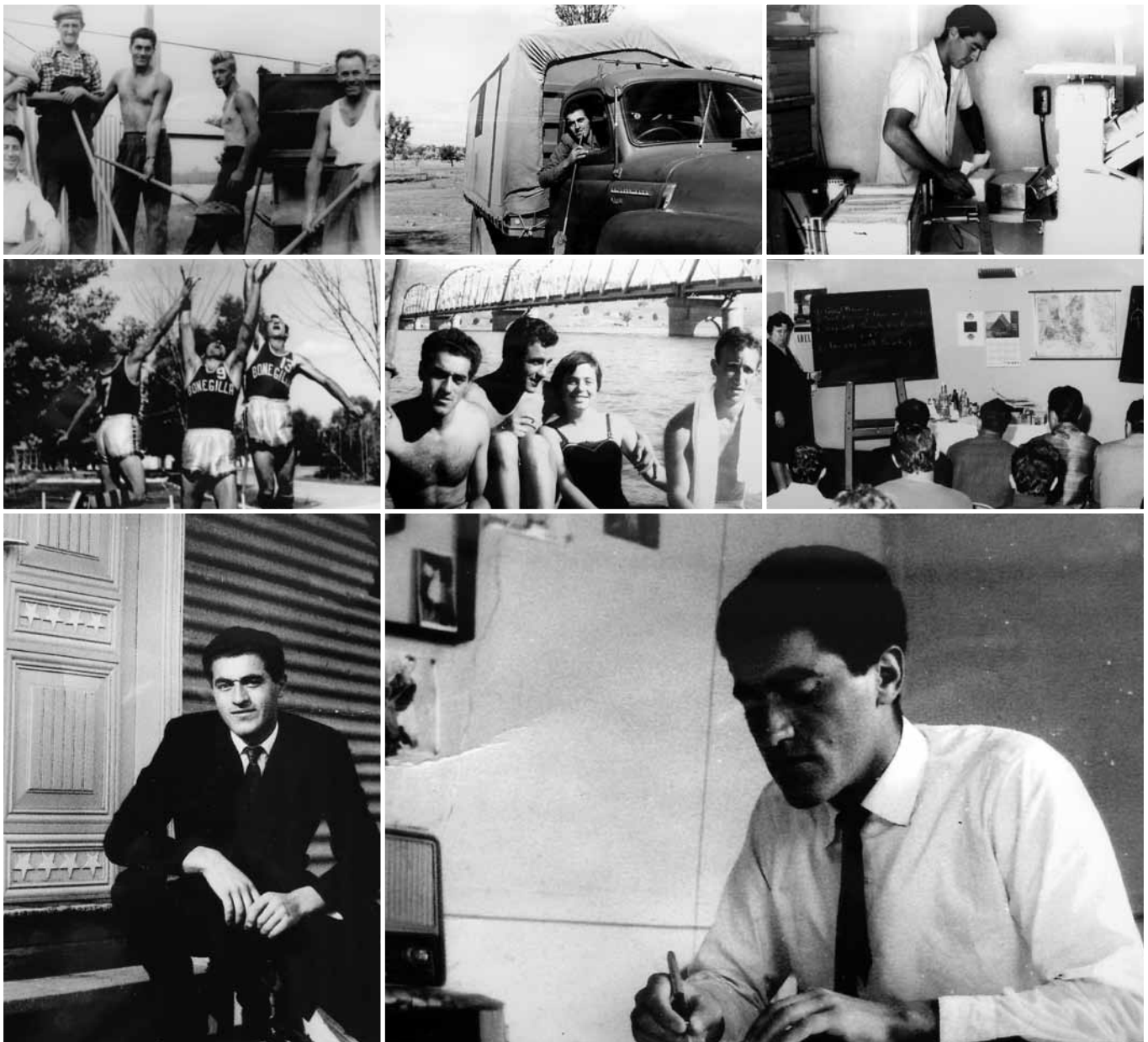
He brought to Australia a brother, a sister and up to thirty cousins.

The photographs Vogiazopoulos has reproduced in his book show and name a large number of Greeks at Bonegilla. They show the Bonegilla United football team and young Greeks swimming and enjoying happy times at Bonegilla and at Greta, where he was later posted.



Alek Lyras, by way of contrast, came later when there were fewer Greeks at Bonegilla and when accommodation facilities at the Reception Centre were being improved. He did not have English or other languages. He was classified as a rural worker and initially employed at the Centre as a labourer. He stayed much longer, working in various jobs until the end of 1965.

Lyras came in 1956, a year after his older brother Spiros (Sam). For him, Bonegilla was a multi-national rather than a Greek experience. He enjoyed the company of people from a mix of nationalities in a similar situation. The annotations he has made on the back of his photos bear not only the names of those he befriended, but also their nationality: Bonegilla United football team had a Greek goal keeper, Ananias Iliadis, but there were also Austrian, German, Italian and Yugoslav players. Pointing to the staff club building he told a journalist, 'If I close my eyes, I can just see, feel and hear the people dancing. They played the music of different nations. The trumpeter was a Dutchman, the pianist German, the guitarist Italian, the saxophonist German, the drummer a Yugoslav. There were folk dances, waltzes and even the can-can.'¹ The music he could hear in his head had him bounding round the room to 'The Blue Danube', gliding gently to 'Lili Marlene' or growing increasingly more exuberant to 'Zorba'. In his head, the accompaniment, for all but the last, was more likely to be a live band or a piano accordion rather than a bouzouki. He brought another brother and his niece to Australia.



From the top: Alek Lyras was initially given Bonegilla gardening and laboring duties with Spiros. That was the kind of employment deemed appropriate for a person with a rural worker's background. He learned to drive a truck while carting rubbish to the incinerators and was later to boast he had begun life in Australia as a 'garbologist'. He , then, joined the Stores Department where he took up delivery duties. The milk urns and potato bags were often heavy. The bread had to be sliced before delivery to each of the messes. His photos show him playing with the Bonegilla basketball team and boating on Lake Hume. There are also the quieter moments. He remembers having to attend English classes on Tuesday and Thursday nights: 'it was hard'. He was proud of the wooden door Spiros fashioned for a hut that became the Greek Orthodox Church at Bonegilla. Then, there were the letters home to Babba and Mamma. He has donated materials to the Albury Library Museum and retains an active involvement in the development of a commemorative centre.

The transients

Most people spent only a short time in the Reception Centre, but some transients have retained strong Bonegilla connections.

Theo Emmanouilidis has been instrumental in establishing a collective memory of the place, principally by organizing tours and events at the site for his compatriots, particularly the fiftieth and fifty fifth anniversaries of the arrival of the first post-war assisted Greeks. In 2007 when a proposed mini-festival faltered, he helped save the occasion by arranging for Greek dancers and a choir to perform and by helping Greek visitors to get to Bonegilla. He has created videotaped records of events at the site and has collected a large number of clippings from the Greek language newspapers. Emmanouilidis retained much of the paperwork and paraphernalia related to his migration and generously donated it to the Albury Library Museum. He arrived in February 1954 and was dispatched after six days to fruit picking. He brought his parents and the girl he was to marry to Australia.



FORM OF UNDERTAKING GIVEN BY THE UNDERTAKER AND THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA TO ASSISTANCE GRANTS OFFICE, DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS, AUSTRALIA.

THE UNDERTAKER'S NAME (Full Address).....

THE REPRESENTATIVE'S NAME (Full Address).....

THE UNDERTAKER'S SIGNATURE (Signature of Undertaker).....

THE REPRESENTATIVE'S SIGNATURE (Signature of Representative of the Commonwealth Government).....

IN consideration of the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia having agreed to accept me for settlement in Australia, pursuant to arrangements made between the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia, the Royal Hellenic Government and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration in conformity with the Commonwealth of Australia in the manner following:

(i) For a period of six years after my arrival in Australia I shall remain in employment approved by the Commonwealth Government;

(ii) That should I require for special reasons to depart from the Commonwealth of Australia before the expiration of two years from the date of my arrival I will, prior to my departure, pay to the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia an amount of £25 sterling in respect of my passage to Australia together with £25 sterling in respect of passage to Australia of each adult member of my family;

(iii) I shall use every endeavour to learn the English language and to attend regularly the night classes which are conducted for all migrants at the Commonwealth Government's expense for the purpose of learning the English language.

TO BE SIGNED IN DUPLICATE BY THE UNDERTAKER AND A COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVE WHO SHALL RETAIN THE ORIGINAL AND SEND THE COPY TO THE SIGNATURE OFFICE.



Emmanouilidis' memorabilia includes a photo of his Departure Day from his Greek village and a copy of his employment undertaking. He and his wife, Helen, have retained the photographs they exchanged before they met and married.

John Antoniou had a professional as well as personal connection with Bonegilla. He arrived as 20-year old, after he had graduated from high school. He was sent to work with a railway maintenance crew 220 miles from Port Augusta. He left without notifying anyone, made his way to Adelaide and tried to get help from a cousin. The cousin was unable to get him a job, but Antoniou found factory work in Melbourne with the help of members of the Greek community. He later went to work at the Post Office and undertook university studies as a part-timer. He was subsequently employed by the Department of Immigration, serving as an interpreter and accountant/ auditor. He visited Bonegilla in those capacities and was for a short time stationed at Benalla Holding Centre. He became a migrant selection officer and had several overseas postings. He has been supportive of Bonegilla as a commemorative centre, bringing to it the perspectives of a transient migrant, a reception centre officer and a Departmental official. He brought his immediate family to Australia - his parents, an older brother and two younger sisters.



Georgia (Hatzaras) Wright shared her recall of arriving as a 6 year-old in 1955 in a sustained newspaper memory piece at the time of a reunion festival in 1997,²

My child's memory conjures up a bus driving at dusk at Bonegilla, a migrant hostel, made up of little army huts, dusty, dirty and uninviting.... Mother quickly found a brush and pan and started scrubbing away at the filth that had been left on the floor and walls by the previous inhabitants... [We were summoned to breakfast the next morning with] a ding, dong, clang!! A loud gong rang out its steely greeting, as if to prayer.... A large steel triangle swayed from a tin roof and was struck regularly by a large, burly man all dressed in white, a white apron and a funny tall white hat on his head... We queued up outside for breakfast, while our parents hesitantly opened up broken conversation with other new arrivals, always listening in earnest for another Greek-sounding word or name... [I remember] the beckoning smell of wonderfully thick warm cocoa, square toasted bread and jam. It was ladled out from huge iron pots... The bush became our playground.... Finding work was top priority for the men... [After a few weeks] were herded out by train after my father found a job at the Port Kembla Steelworks. We were lucky enough to have a rented room for us in a house owned by a Yugoslav couple and which was occupied by at least another three young Greek families... Later we had to get used to the word 'wog' and 'dago' and 'why don't you go back to where you came from'.

Imaginative responses to Bonegilla and Greek arrival experiences

Even before the 1987 Bonegilla reunion that gave birth to the idea of a Bonegilla Museum, two writers of Greek extraction, first, TT.O, a playwright and poet, and then, Tes Lyssiotis, a playwright, attempted to explain what Bonegilla might have meant to its migrant residents. They had two quite different readings of the impact of Bonegilla on newcomers, but together helped stir interest in the site as a Memory Place.

TT.O was aged not quite three and a half when he arrived in 1955 with his father, mother and sister. His father, Aristion Oustabasidis, was dispatched to fruit picking at Shepparton after twelve days in Bonegilla. Aristion left before a week was out and, with his family, went absent without leave. They ‘escaped Bonegilla’. In 1959 TT.O had exposure to Bonegilla again. He developed further his understanding of the place when, later, he started reading old newspapers on which to found a poetry cycle about his family’s move from Greece. He shared his discoveries with ‘Darc’ Cassidy of the ABC and they set about interviewing migrants and former reception centre staff to form a radio documentary impression that was broadcast in 1982.³

The radio program focused on the riots of 1961 and traced the involvement of people like Clyde Holding, Jim Cairns and Frank Galbally, who appeared as champions of those arrested for riot. This riot was for them and for TT.O an overlooked workers’ protest, ‘another Eureka’. In the program TT.O tells of the importance of the job interview in which there was little if any interchange of information. He empathizes with those who waited for months for a job and had little to do but walk aimlessly about. He likens separation to tearing a wedding photo in half.

TT.O continued to work on poems that helped illustrate the radio program. He has published and given public readings of several as a performance poet. He has reflected critically on what he learned about the migrant experience of post-war migration. He is bitter about the way migrants were seen as ‘industrial cannon-fodder’, ‘wogs for cogs’, a ‘bottomless pit of cheap labour’, mere ‘pick and shovel men’, who were not to take jobs from Australians.

TT.O’s poetry is an imaginative response to Bonegilla that was far from fond. He was, for example, struck with the noise the crude tin huts would make as they expanded and contracted as the day heated up and then cooled. Always adventurous with words and typography, he likens their ‘crackcrackcrackcrackcrack’ to ‘a tin playedagram’. He uses a small ‘i’ to suggest an interviewee’s perception of his place in a job interview at Bonegilla.

When the interview with the Employment Officer began – he very politely asked me what it was I would like to do?, and I said “If i told you that would it make any difference?”, and he said [frankly speaking] “No” but it just sounds good when I ask you that....⁴

The radio documentary and the poems trace what seem to be a series of humiliations, which his father endured.

There were the tough screening procedures to be endured in Greece. There was the rudimentary accommodation at Bonegilla, which was set in the middle of nowhere. There was the allocation of newcomers to undesirable jobs. His father remained angry all his life about the way the migrant experience was structured by unsympathetic policy makers and administrators. TT.O dislikes the way benign representations of Bonegilla brush over its indignities and hurts. Instead, they have it working some kind of homogenizing magic.

Tess Lyssiotis wrote and staged a semi-documentary play called ‘Hotel Bonegilla’ in 1983. She drew in part on TT. O’s research to explore the migrant experience of Bonegilla. Hers was a far less critical story. She saw Bonegilla as special – a place to which people returned to claim something of their family heritage and to put their family’s story into some context.⁵ In her play she portrayed a series of incidents that revealed some of the humour and pathos involved when people ran into a different language. Her play contained Greek voices, and she suggested that the introductory music be played on a Santori. Otherwise the play conveys the multi-national nature of the Reception Centre.

Vicki Karaminas, too, does not feel kindly about the way her father was received into Australia. In her imagination she moves with her father beyond Bonegilla to his arrival at this first place of work on the South Australian Riverlands. She has re-imagined how he was first greeted and then wakened the next morning.⁶

Oi youse two blokes, I said, git yar gear and git over here. Whatcha names? Can’t speak ya foreign lingo mates but as long as youse both know I’m the Bossman then we’ll git along just fine. Got meself a nice piece of land with a few grapes that youse two blokes will be working’ on. Don’t make much dough but I score meself a few bob on a beaut drop of wine, which gits me by. Any of youse two blokes “I-ties”? Well don’t make much diff anyways, cause you lot all look like the same mob. Too right. S’tue. Got it? Now ya know I can’t pay youse much but I’m willing to throw in ya feed and gives youse a humpy to sleep in.

Righto, now listen up, I don’t want any complainin’, ya heer? Cause ya both luck to be ‘ere, as long as youse both know it we’ll be right. Yeh, and keep away from the Missus, cause I knows plenty about youse foreign types... Righto, you blokes git otta the sack. Orright? Got no room for bludgers round ‘ere mates. We’re all battlers in this country and we’re fair dinkum proud of it. Now if youse two don git yer Refo arses out there, I’m gonna call the Gov’mnt to come and get year en they can send yers back to where the bloody hell youse come from.

David Martin was not a Greek, but a Hungarian Jew who arrived in 1949. He tried to imagine how a bride ship arrival might have been perceived by the young apprehensive Cypriot woman he depicted in his novel *The young wife* (Sun Books, Melbourne, 1962).

The grooms and the lovers were getting out of hand. Ignoring the shouts of the ship's officers and evading the harassed policemen who guarded the gangways, they assaulted the steep flanks of the vessel like boarding parties. Some were trying to get a foothold in the open portholes of the crew's quarters, through which laughing men in singlets looked out. A few daring ones were climbing into the shore net that had already been dropped...

Standing a little apart, Anna was looking down from the fore'ard end of the boat-deck where the press was not so severe. This upsurge of collective passion frightened her because she could feel the responding need of the women of the brideship who were calling out to the men below. She was too nervous to take her eyes off the pier for long, afraid that she and Yannis would not recognize each other. Never had she longed so much for her mother, and never had her mother been farther away than now.

She began to scan the faces on the pier one by one. But the crowd was restless. A snapshot of Yannis was in her handbag and she would have liked to look at it again, but as it was possible that he was watching her unseen, she refrained. Once or twice she thought she heard someone calling her name.



Vogiazopoulos included in his book a photograph of his brother being the most insistent of the grooms-to-be clambering the side of a ship to welcome his bride.

Woman's Day provided an account of one arrival that was perhaps not fictional but was told with storyteller flair.⁷

On one occasion, romance would go horribly awry. One Greek girl, dismayed at the unexpected age of the fiancé waiting for her, hid herself on the boat, and promptly met another Greek man: 'The

eyes of Vasiliki and George met', and by that evening they had decided to marry. Meanwhile, the original intended had "set up a hue and cry" for his missing fiancée. Police were hunting for her when she and George turned up at police headquarters to explain.' With a few friends the jilted fiancé arrived at the house where Vasiliki was now staying: 'At an excited conference attended by milling Greek friends, relatives and bystanders, his representatives declared "We don't want the girl back any more. We want the money we have spent." By the next day, arrangements had been made to restore his finances, if not his dignity'.

Recorded Oral Histories

George Kotsiros shared his work story with Bridget Guthrie of Albury Library Museum for the Migration Heritage Centre's 'Belongings' website.

George arrived as a 19 year-old in 1955 and stayed at Bonegilla for 23 days. He accepted harvest work at an asparagus farm after declining jobs in sugar cane fields ('I heard there are snakes') and at a timber mill. After the harvest he was sent to Yallourn. 'I didn't like that job much, the coal used to get into my lungs. Every night the white clothes I was wearing were black with coal dust.' He applied for work with the State Rivers Water Supply Commission. 'He said, "What sort of job do you want?" I said, "Anything. Pick and shovel, jackhammer or anything at all" ... So I went on the truck to the work site and they gave me a jackhammer. He found work in a café and eventually opened his own milk bar. 'I used to work very long hours in the milk bar, often 'til 1am and starting very early. Sometimes I would not see the children I was working to hard. The milk bar was next to the Hoyts Theatre. We used to make lemonade and homemade soft drinks for the people who went to the cinema [and] sell a lot of ice-cream and chocolates too.'

Con Frangonasopoulos similarly shared his work story with the 'Belongings' project.

Con recalled, as a 17 year-old, spending 18 days at Bonegilla before he was sent to Port Kembla steelworks. A cousin came to Port Kembla, met him at the steelworks gates, and took him to Broken Hill and to an uncle and aunt he had never met before. There he found work and stayed.

Visitor Book Memory Fragments

Visitor book entries are usually brief. Those who were young recall sensory impressions and recreational activities. Some recall reception centre regimentation. Others remember linguistic confusions.

‘It got confusing being Christoula and Christine at the same time’, aged 6, 1954.

‘As an eight-year-old I remember my mother’s tears, the heat, the cool ice cream we used to buy from the canteen, and lots of men in white singlets playing soccer, or throwing horseshoes on the pole’, Apostolos and Sophia, 1955.

‘Swimming at the lake, playing soccer amongst ourselves’, Leo, 1954.

‘Good memories, a job ... the best basketball in the centre; movies, bushfires’, Elles, 1959.

‘I remember lining up for breakfast, lunch and tea, and the huts we stayed in’, Asterios 1955.

‘We were disappointed when my father came back from shopping with what he declared was a jar of honey, and we found it was a jar of mustard’, Maria.n.d.

‘I enjoyed my time at Bonegilla and I made lots of friends... My time at Bonegilla have me a good start’, Theo, 1963.

Remembering food

at Bonegilla

Few Greeks comment on the food. Bonegilla officers, however, thought the Greeks needed special dietary care. The Greeks, they said, preferred ‘oily food’, and catering officers had to buy in more tomato puree. When the numbers justified it, they designated one mess for Greek use. The former residents interviewed for this project did not comment unprompted on the absence of olives and olive oil and the infrequency of serving fish.⁸ They did comment on the way food was presented, cafeteria style at strict times.

Theo Saitis gave an account of how he was employed as a cook in 1963.

When we were at Block 19, the staff block, they served up fish and chips. After seeing the food, which did not appeal to me, I said to the boss of the kitchens, Mr Ilich, “Is this what you call fish and chips?” He said to me, “Can you do it better than this?” I said to him, “Of course I can”.

The next week they asked me if I wanted to work in Block 19... The first dish they made me make was fish and chips. When I made the fish and chips the Russians said “harasho, harasho” which means “very good”. I also made dolmades and bastitsio.

Greek food

Young single Greek men had to meet the challenges of cooking and shopping for food and cooking it, sometimes

in work camp locations. A home and a job in a city seemed to offer the chance of eating again in a familiar way. Some in the host society liked to think Greek cuisine lent another dimension to ‘gastronomic multiculturalism’. Those closer to the young, single Greek workers saw it differently.

Ron Haberfield of Haberfield’s Dairy in Albury remembers fondly the Greeks among the other immigrants his family employed. Ron was impressed with the frugality of the recent arrivals. They would seize on milk bottles retrieved by the milk deliverer from houses where the householder had not given notice that they would be away. They would wrap the sour milk, which was, after several days, becoming junket-like, in cheesecloth and hang it up in the dairy yard to dry. It would drain into a firm curd not unlike cottage cheese or ricotta. They used their ‘home-made cheese’ in the day-old bread they bought cheaply from the bakery opposite the dairy.

Arrival Impressions

Efthimios Kondos takes the story telling further back. Kondos observed shipboard responses as the ship was berthing in Melbourne.⁹ There was an order of precedence that he thought ‘inscribed a stigma of shame and humiliation’. Perhaps Kondos wanted to be reassured that those who came independently of government assistance would be treated better.

Gathered together again on the deck, those who had got their things ready in good time were observing their surroundings with some uneasiness and awe as we drew close to the port... ‘Our families will be waiting for us’, several said... Some had already been recruited on the ship by the representatives of companies who had come on board a Fremantle for this purpose. They had now been bound with a contract, with the chain of production and hurry-up. Worse was the fate of those who were going to the encampments. To the notorious hostels [almost invariably Bonegilla]. There were no happy shouts to be heard from them, nor would they have a ‘welcome’ from their relations. For them the universe was a number on a page of their passports and a stamp to say in which saloon they would be assembled. This is how the official of the Department of Immigration had arranged things.

First [to disembark were] Australian subjects and those who had come on board at Fremantle. The older established [pre-war] migrants would follow those who were returning from a holiday trip... Then would follow those who had been invited by relative and friends, and afterwards the independent people like yours truly. Finally, the numbered people, holding their passports high in

one hand so they could be distinguished, and their single suitcase in the other.

They were lined up in a queue, accompanied at front and rear by customs men, until they were handed over to the railwaymen who would transport them to various hostels which were scattered in different regions of this vast continent.



(Vogiazopoulos)

Two contributors to the 'Share Your Story' collection at the Immigration Museum, Melbourne, recall similar arrival impressions.

Nicoleta Kyriakidou recalls being impressed as an 8 year-old girl that at Station Pier people were

calling out names and greetings to the new arrivals. Those without family and friends to greet them were sent to Bonegilla. Dimitrios Koulouris recalls reception centre regimentation. He remembers 'being herded' into a bus, 'being allocated a hut', 'being sent to work'.

Ana (Anastasia) Kokkinos, an Australian-born filmmaker, goes back further again to give account of why her parents, Spiros and Zafiroula, migrated to Australia through Bonegilla in 1954. Given the way so many Greeks brought family members and friends to join them, her final words convey something of the wrench of distance in the 1950s and 1960s.

Greece was war-torn country, there were very few opportunities ... in many ways it was a claustrophobic place ... They had both made the decision to come out together. Australia was a totally unknown thing for them. But they were young, they had an adventurous spirit, and were keen to get away from Europe... Once they got here, despite the hardships, they felt freer. They were the only ones who came out from their respective families. Nobody followed.

George Veneris, formerly proprietor of the Riverina Café in Albury, observed that Greeks without family in Australia were often invited to join former Bonegilla friends on family occasions.¹⁰

Endnotes

¹ Quoted by Dennis Godfrey, 'Bonegilla Meeting Place of the World', Department of Immigration, 1987.

² *Okosmos*, 7 October 1997.

³ TT.O, 'The Bonagilla Riots', ABC Radio 1982.

⁴ '1/- Welcher' in TT.O, *Big Numbers*, Collective Effort Press, 2008.

⁵ Interviews with Lyssiotis, G Sluga, 'Dis/placed', *Meanjin*, 48 (1), 1989, p.158 and *Age* 24 June 1998.

⁶ Greetings from Australia, *Borderlands* 2, (3), 2003.

⁷ *Woman's Day* 29 July 1957 quoted in John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, UNSW Press Sydney 2000, p.165.

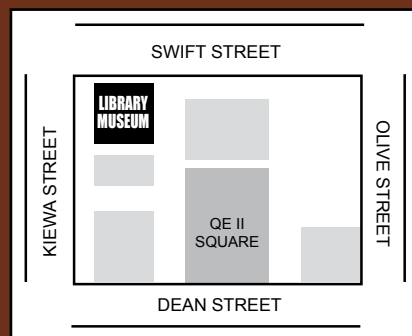
⁸ Exchange of correspondence, 21-27 November 1956, NAA A2567/1956/104.

⁹ 'Emigration: Outlet to Despair' quoted in George Kanarakis ed *Greek Voices in Australia*, ANU, Canberra, 1988, pp.260-262.

¹⁰ Interview with Bruce Pennay, November 2010.



The Bonegilla Migrant Experience Heritage Park
www.bonegilla.org.au



The Bonegilla Collection at Albury LibraryMuseum
www.bonegilla.com

Author

Bruce Pennay OAM, Charles Sturt University

Design

THOMSON'S GRAPHIPRESS, Albury

Acknowledgements

This work draws heavily on personal interview material; records in the Bonegilla Collection at Albury LibraryMuseum and files in the National Australian Archives, especially the Bonegilla Cards. It uses images taken from Zac Vogiazopoulos, *Memories of Bonegilla* and the collections of Alek Lyras and Theo Emmanouilidis. The cover photo belonged to Mary Kaperonis and is reprinted with the permission of Zac Vogiazopoulos. The cartoon of the Queensland work overseer is from C Panich, *Sanctuary*, Allen & Unwin Sydney, p.120.

Research was undertaken with the encouragement and support of Christos Salamanis, Consul General of Greece in Melbourne, the Victorian Multicultural Commission, Wodonga and Albury City Councils and Parklands Albury-Wodonga. Funding for publication came from Wodonga City Council and the Commonwealth Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities to celebrate Australian Heritage Week 2011.



At Bonegilla Series: *Greek Journeys through Bonegilla*; *Receiving Europe's Displaced*; *The Young at Bonegilla*; *The Army at Bonegilla*; *Calwell's Beautiful Balts*; *Never Enough Dutch*; *Food at Bonegilla*.

Related works: *Albury-Wodonga's Bonegilla* and *So Much Sky*.

ISSN: 1834-6359

Published by Parklands Albury-Wodonga
 PO Box 1040, Wodonga, Victoria 3689

© 2011