

Games Village

The Commonwealth Games celebrate the ultimate achievements of human health. The Games Village is on the site of the former Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital, where those seen as “lunatics” and then as “the insane” gradually became seen as patients with a treatable mental illness.



Royal Park Hospital Ward, 1906-1913

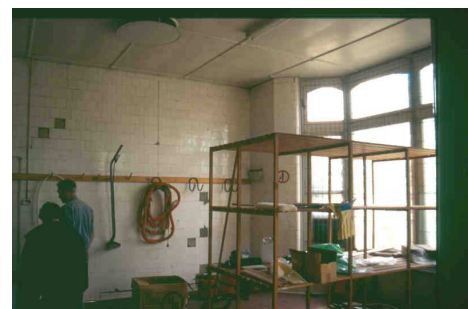
Where the Commonwealth Games Athletes Village now stands, Melbourne’s Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital stood for nearly 100 years. The red brick buildings of the ‘heritage precinct’ are what remains of the original complex of hospital buildings. Royal Park Hospital is listed (H2606) in the Victorian Heritage Register for its historic and architectural values.

The buildings were designed by Public Works architect SE Bindley in a domestic Queen Anne style, and constructed in 1906-1913. All but one of the registered buildings have been retained in the Games Village by careful planning, and are now restored.

The history of psychiatric hospitals is closely linked to attitudes to mental health and the mentally ill. Early asylums kept the mentally ill out of society, just as jails kept criminals.

Historically, Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital was part of reforms which emphasised early diagnosis and swift hospital treatment for mentally ill patients. It was the first psychiatric hospital established in Victoria after the Lunacy Act of 1903, and was intended for patients with curable disorders.

The 20th century saw Victoria’s attitudes to mental illness move from viewing it as insanity and incurable, to seeing it as a health problem open to treatment like any other illness.



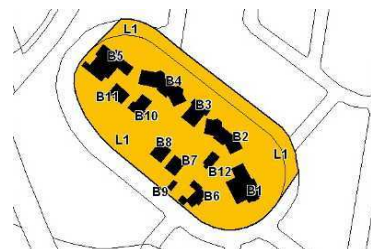
Pathology / Mortuary Block, 1909: interior

Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital was part of two important developments in psychiatric treatment. In the mid-20th century Dr. Eric Cunningham Dax used art in the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. He has left over 12,000 works of psychiatric art to the nation.

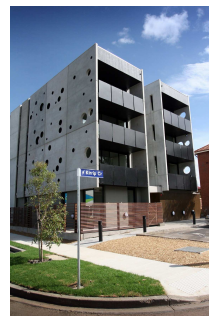
Australian psychiatrist John Cade revolutionised the treatment of manic depression (bipolar disorder) in 1949 by discovering the role of lithium in its treatment. In 1970 lithium was introduced into the treatment of bipolar disorder, which afflicts up to 2% of the world's population. Lithium has saved billions of dollars in hospitalisation costs world-wide.

The Victorian Government's restoration of these buildings took money and much commitment to heritage conservation. Careful planning of the new around the old structures, and a detailed restoration process, will leave the city a major legacy from the Commonwealth Games.

The buildings are fitted out temporarily for Games accommodation. After the Games they will become residential apartments, a child care centre (B6), and an aged care and community facility (B5).



- B1 Male Acute Ward
- B2 Male Convalescent Ward
- B3 Dining/Recreation Hall and Kitchen
- B4 Female Convalescent Ward
- B5 Female Acute Ward
- B6 Mortuary/Pathology Block
- B7 Male Workers Block
- B8 Workshop
- B9 Paint Store/Morgue
- B10 Female Attendants (Staff) Block
- B11 Female Workers Block
- B12 Male Attendants (Staff) Block



The Commonwealth Games celebrate the ultimate achievements of human health. It is fitting that the Games Village is on the site of this hospital, which played such an important role in the 20th century's efforts to improve the physical and mental health of Victorians.

The Victorian Heritage Register

The Register was established under the Heritage Act 1995 to protect the most significant heritage buildings in Victoria. Its scope covers archaeological sites including shipwrecks, industrial heritage, cemeteries, heritage objects, gardens, trees and cultural landscapes.

Over 2,000 places and objects are now on the Victorian Heritage Register, including the Melbourne Cricket Ground ('the MCG').

The Heritage Council of Victoria decides which places go on the Register, based on established criteria for heritage values.