

## Finding Your Family in the Hostel

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### Introduction

This brief guide is intended to help those of you who are trying to find out more about your family members who came as Post-World War Two migrants to Australia and stayed in hostels. It is based on my own research within archives and libraries around Australia on this topic and is not, by any means, a definitive guide.

Archive and library staff are always available to help you with individual searches and are wonderful teachers and resources so always seek their help. The archives also run regular information sessions and events such as *Shake Your Family Tree* to help researcher learn more about their holdings and how to access them.

At the end of this document you can also find some useful links and a list of the limited published works currently available on the migrant hostels in Australia.

### Where to Begin

Finding your family members in the hostel system can be time consuming and difficult. As with all genealogical research the family historians' mantra applies –**begin with as much information as you can!** Ask relatives everything they know about how your ancestors/family members arrived and write a time line. Where did they come from? What ship did they travel on? When did they arrive? Who travelled? Which scheme did they arrive under? Which state did they settle in? Did they stay at a hostel? What work did they do? All of these types of details can offer leads to aid your research.

In the Post-World War Two period, from as early as 1947 migrants arrived in Australia under a number of schemes and by a variety of methods. Some paid their own way, others were sponsored by family members and other contacts already in Australia, or by companies who sought their expertise or labour, and some came as refugees from war-torn Europe and later from other areas escaping communism and political turmoil. A large number of new arrivals also came as assisted passage migrants under Government schemes such as the so called 'Ten Pound Pom' arrangement or under various agreements such as the Italian Assisted Passage Scheme (1952). As Australia cast its net ever wider for suitable migrants, agreements were signed with a large number of countries across Europe. Like the British Scheme these individual European agreements allowed migrants to travel to Australia for a set amount (approximately £10) and some also provided loans for that £10 to be paid once in Australia. As time passed, migrants also arrived from other areas of the world including refugees from South East Asia, the Middle East and South America.

Virtually all refugees and assisted passage migrants were housed, for varying lengths of time, in the migrant hostel system. The earliest hostels (and I will use this term as a generic name for all types of centres) were the so called Reception and Training Centres, such as Bonegilla (Albury/Wodonga) and Woodside in South Australia. These camps were often established in ex-army or air force bases or existing buildings such as the woolsheds at Port Adelaide (Rosewater). In conjunction with these centres were Holding Camps, for women and children, and workers camps for the 'breadwinners'. Finally, purpose built hostels were established, often using Nissen Huts or other prefabricated

structures, for family groups and married couples, although single men and women were often also housed there.

Your family members may have stayed at one or all of these types of hostels and movement across the various hostels and across the country was common especially for Displaced Persons and other migrants on work contracts who had to go to where they were sent for employment. It is important to remember that although you think your family might have always been in South Australia they may very well have come through Bonegilla or into another port and gone to other hostels such as Greta in New South Wales or Northam in Western Australia before coming to South Australia.

A second point to remember is that hostels were both Commonwealth and State Government operated and therefore the records relating to various hostels may be held in different archival offices. For information on Commonwealth Government Hostels (e.g. Finsbury/Pennington, Glenelg, Woodside) and on arrival information in general the National Archives of Australia is the major source. They have offices in all capital cities but unfortunately the records are not housed according to state but rather according to the agency/department that created them. Therefore for South Australia records may be found in Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney as well as Adelaide. Furthermore, as the National Archives website states: 'Not many records of these migrant 'camps' have survived, but those that have can provide information about the migrants.'

For those hostels which were State Government operated (e.g. Elder Park, Gepps Cross from 1952, Semaphore, Woodville) records are held in the State Records Office of South Australia.

There is, however, occasionally some cross over between these organisations. For example in the post-War period butter rationing was still in operation and the allowance for migrants at the State operated Elder Park hostel is the subject of files in the National Archives (e.g. NAA Melbourne, B5661, 1948/669, Butter Ration to British migrants temporarily accommodated, Elder Park, SA, Barcode 932558). The following page is reproduced from that file. While it might not give you migrant names, files on associated topics often tell us something about life in the hostels and how the hostels operated. In this instance we are told that Elder Park was a British migrant hostel and was generally used as short term accommodation. It also tells us that the early migrants, like the Australian residents of the day, were issued with ration cards and that three meals a day, as well as morning and afternoon tea, were provided at the hostel.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

RATIONING COMMISSION.

DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF RATIONING.

RICHARDS BUILDING,

99 CURRIE STREET, ADELAIDE.

22nd November, 1948.



48/669

MEMORANDUM FOR:

The Director of Rationing,  
MELBOURNE.

Receipt is acknowledged of your memorandum of November 17 - 48/669 - enclosing copy of memorandum received from the Secretary; Department of Immigration, with reference to butter allotted to the Immigration Reception Depot.

The majority of British Migrants arriving from the United Kingdom proceed to their destinations from the boat; but a percentage has been accommodated at the Immigration Hostel; Elder Park, Adelaide for short periods, whilst awaiting transport to country districts; and, also, in some cases, pending the purchasing of household effects prior to their taking up residence in their new homes.

The State Immigration Department engages an official caterer to supply the meals: and arrangements have been made for a bank of food coupons to be made available to the Department, who then issues butter and tea to the caterer as required, at the catering scale for meals supplied at Hotels; Residentials and Guest Homes. Thus the allowance is exactly the same as for all other cafes providing for casual meals.

Only in isolated cases do the migrants' stays at the Hostel exceed six (6) days, and, where this does occur, arrangements have been made for the surrender of coupons covering the stay; as the new arrivals are issued with ration cards prior to proceeding to the Hostel.

The caterer receives an allowance for all meals supplied, and the coupons so collected are returned to this office; but only one (1) batch has been received since the arrangement has been in operation.

The four (4) ounces referred to in the third paragraph of the memorandum received from the Secretary of the Department of Immigration are arrived at, possibly, on the basis of

85 meals - or 80 sandwiches = 1 lb.

that is - the catering allowance, and the civilian ration of six (6) ounces per week for twenty one meals. If such is the case, in addition to three meals per day for seven days; morning and afternoon teas, etc., have to be provided for out of the civilian ration of six (6) ounces weekly: thus the comparison is not a fair one.

The relevant file is enclosed for your perusal, and I shall be pleased if you will return same at your earliest convenience.

*S.T. North*  
S.T. North

DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF RATIONING

24 NOV P.M.  
Enc.

B5661  
1948/669

*See*

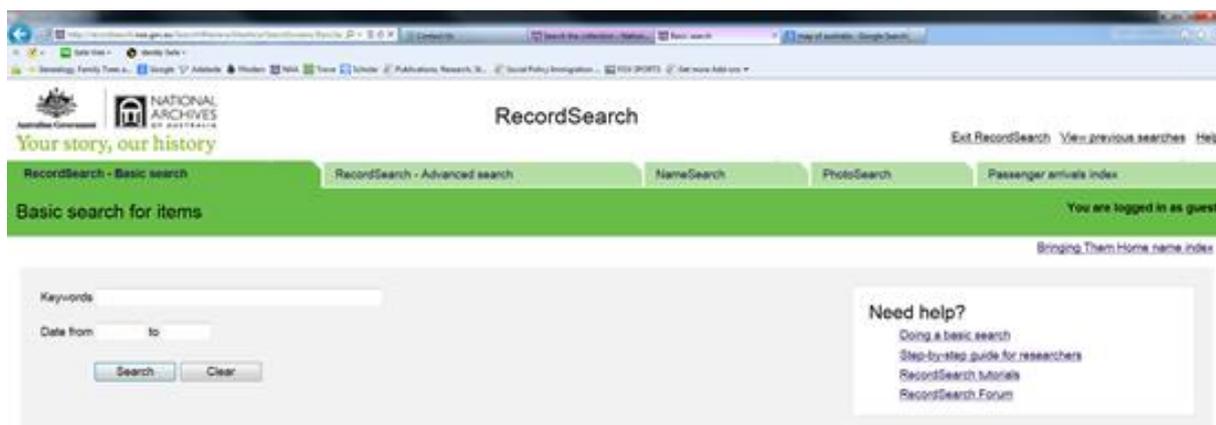
*to the general basis  
the 4 oz are given what  
more catering scale than  
based on number of meals  
served, not necessary as  
less gets well covered  
system*

## National Archives of Australia

The National Archives of Australia (NAA) has a searchable website [www.naa.gov.au](http://www.naa.gov.au) On this site you will find many aids to help you with your research including a large number of fact/information sheets, office locations and hours, publications etc. There is also a facility to ask the archive a question if you are having trouble or need help. It is worth spending some time looking at what is on offer through this website.

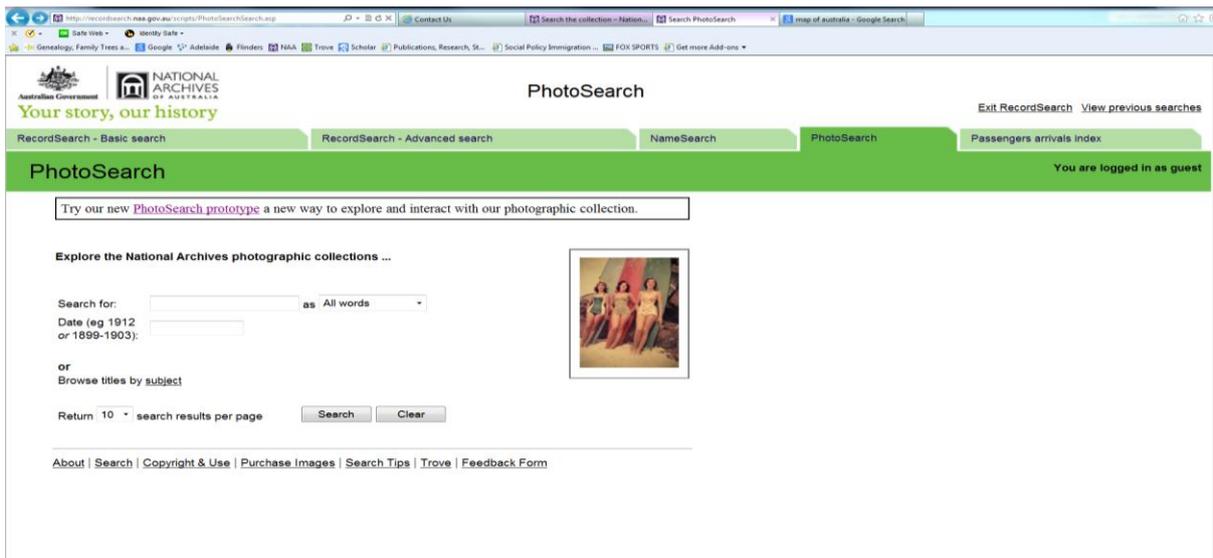
On the front page you will see a blue section entitled “The Collection” and under this are many of the links for information mentioned above. There is also a link “Search the collection”. This link will take you to the archives search engine. The archive is searchable both by a basic search (the page is reproduced below) or an advanced search. The best way to start is with keywords. Put in a name of a person, a ship or a hostel and see what you get but remember that spellings may vary and sometimes you have to think outside the box. Obviously the more information you have (using the advanced search facility) the more you can narrow down the results.

What you find may, or may not be accessible to you immediately. If the file has been digitised (and as a project we have digitised many files) you will be able to read it on line. If the file has not been digitised you will have to go to the office it is held at or you can pay for it to be digitised so that you can read it online. A final point on the NAA files – there are categories of access. Most files from the early post-War years are open for anyone to access. Occasionally files are Open with exception meaning that they have sections that have been kept close for a variety of reasons such as personal information or security. The third category is Not Yet Examined (NYE) and these files need to be examined by archive staff before they can be viewed. This can be done through the website. At the start of this project many files were NYE, however, we have applied for thousands to be examined and therefore major files should be available. It is more likely that any NYE files you come across are more likely to be individual and personal files such as Migrant Selection Documents or Arrival Documents.



The screenshot shows the RecordSearch interface on a web browser. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the National Archives of Australia logo and the text "Your story, our history". The main heading is "RecordSearch". Below this, there are several tabs: "RecordSearch - Basic search" (which is selected), "RecordSearch - Advanced search", "NameSearch", "PhotoSearch", and "Passenger arrivals index". The "Basic search for items" section is active, featuring a search form with a "Keywords" input field, a "Date from" to "to" range, and "Search" and "Clear" buttons. To the right of the search form is a "Need help?" section with links to "Doing a basic search", "Step-by-step guide for researchers", "RecordSearch tutorials", and "RecordSearch Forum".

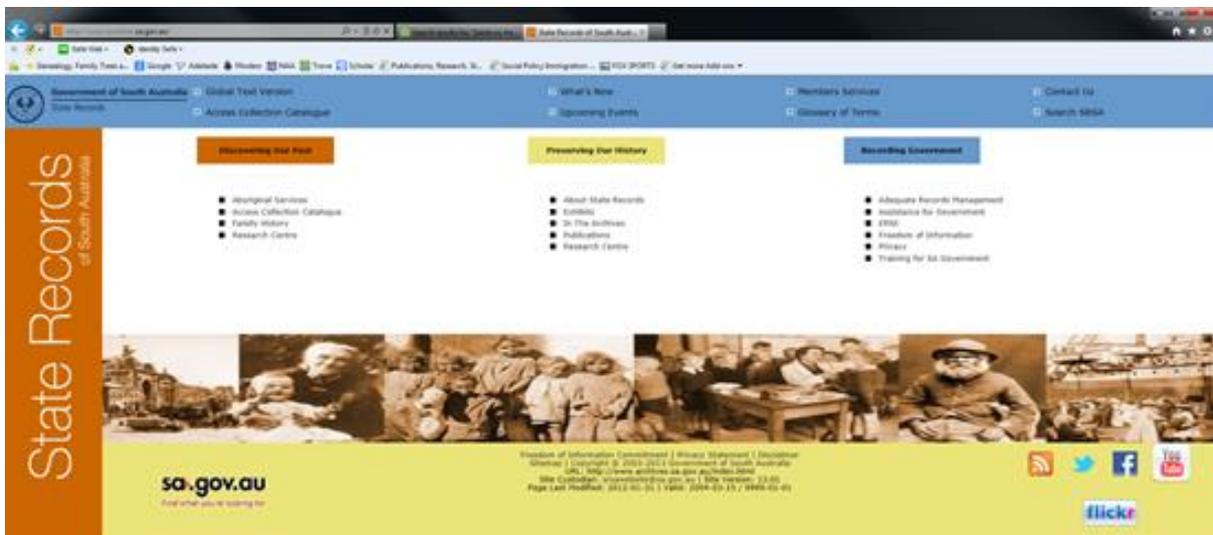
During the hostel period official photographers took thousands of photos of hostels around Australia and many of these are available as digital images on the NAA search engine. These can be searched, again using keywords, through the PhotoSearch option (reproduced below).



Remember that the NAA website has a lot of helpful publications on how to search, how to use keywords etc. in their factsheet section, as well as facilities to ask a question, and that staff at the various offices are there to help you find things.

### State Records of South Australia

For those hostels which were State operated the State Record Office (Gepps Cross and Leigh St, Adelaide) is the main source of information. This archive also has a searchable website and information on how to use the records and how to search.



As part of the Hostel Stories Project, and in conjunction with State Records (one of our partner organisations) a guide to hostel records at this archive was produced by an undergraduate intern and this guide is available on this website.

### What Can I Find?

This is not a question that can be answered on masse. Rather what you will find will depend on what you know, when and how your relatives arrived, what work they did and so on. Within the NAA

there are many records relating to travel and migration. Nominal rolls, migrant selection documents and Displaced Persons records can give you information about a person, their nationality, date and place of birth, ship (or aircraft), spouse and children, occupation etc. Some even contain photographs, names of parents or next of kin and other useful information for family historians. Again fact sheets such as Number 223 *Migrant selection documents held in Adelaide* (<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs223.aspx>) can tell you where these records are held and how to access them. Keyword searches on names can also help you find people within these records.

Some occupations may lead you to various records such as those of the Railways, Forestry, Mining etc., although these records are more likely to give you insight into conditions rather than individuals. Similarly, to get a feel for life in the hostels or what the hostels looked like works files can provide maps and plans or give descriptions of buildings or problems. For example *NAA A879, C1187, Gepps Cross, Enfield, migrant workers hostel lease of site*, is held in the Sydney office but has been digitised and does give descriptions of the construction of the hostel and a map of where it was located - <http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp?B=924217>

The Department of Immigration and then Commonwealth Hostels Limited produced manuals on how to run a hostel and these instructions can give you an idea of how the hostels operated and what the conditions were like. For example <http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp> is the link to the digitised file *NAA, MP414/4, Whole Series, Manual of instructions for the operation of Migrant Workers' hostels*, held in Melbourne.

Finally many, but not all, hostels kept records of the people who resided there. For example for migrants who travelled through Bonegilla there is a card index in Series A2478 held in the NAA Canberra office. Some of these have been digitized and they are indexed by surname so a keyword search by surname (remember spelling variations) may find you a relative. In South Australia, the Woodside Hostel cards are currently being indexed and are held in the NAA Adelaide office in Series D343 and Adelaide staff will be able to help you with these. Other South Australian hostels, including Glenelg, Finsbury/Pennington, Gawler, Smithfield and Rosewater, kept arrival and departure books. Some volumes have been digitized including both volumes of the Gawler (Williston) Hostel (a page reproduced below and available at <http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp?B=10631383> and <http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp?B=10631382>

Date	Time	Room No.	NAME	ADDRESS	Phone No.	SIGNATURE	AGE
1-7-1950	8 am	D 7/8	Palencius (m)	Manba	Myrauda & White Ave (m) Lockleys P. 68506	H. Palencius	
1-7-1950			Palencius	Hemko	P. 68507	H. Palencius	7
1-7-1950			Palencius	Jungis		H. Palencius	4
1-7-1950	8 pm	O 2/6	Kolickyj (m)	Polina	34 Seaside Terrace, Seaside Park P. 68399	G. Kolickyj	
1-7-1950			Kolickyj	Zofia	Adelaide P. 68400	G. Kolickyj	8
1-7-1950	11:34 AM	V 10/11	Koziol M <sup>2</sup>	Anna	FROM GUEST TO STAFF		
5-7-1950	6.00 PM	M 11/11	Koziol M <sup>2</sup>	Anna	ON STAFF FROM GUEST		
2-7-1950	8 pm	C 7/8	Szaron (m)	Wladyslaw	Smithfield		
3-7-50	6 pm	C 12/14	BARANOWICZ	Maryann	Adelaide		
				Nikola			
				ERENA			
4-7-50	10:26	M 22/23	OSKOWSKI	FRANCA	FRIDAY HOSTEL, HALLAMWOOD ROAD		
				LECH			
6-7-50	5:00 pm	E 7/9	WALIK	ANNA	4th FLOOR, FRANCE		
				MARINA			
5-7-50	6 pm	C 3/1-10	LUCZ	ERENA	FRANCE ST NORTH ADE LOCKEYS		
				ERENA			
				ERENA			
6-7-50	7 am	D 15	SANKOWIC	MARIA	WILLIAM STREET, GAWLER		
7-7-50	8 pm	C 11/14	Piotrowski	Agnieszka	251 DENMOND AV. ENFIELD HOALDRE		
7-7-50	8 pm	P 1/2	KLAWINS	ANNA	HOSPITAL DRIVE ROAD, ADELAIDE		
7-7-50	8 pm	N 1/2	Makos	Maddala	Bridgwater, Pine Villa		
8-7-50	8 am	M 13/14	KUMUDA	Helena	General Hospital		
8-7-50	8 pm	E 1/10	DOSIAK	Edmund	From Smithfield		
9-7-50	8 pm	M 13/14	KUMUDA	Hosyl	On leave		
				Nikola			
				Stefan			
10-7-50	10 AM	G 1-3	VOSEL	MARIANNE	From Seaside		
10-7-50	1 PM	I 5/6	GALICZ	MICHAEL	From London		
11-7-50	7:45 AM	G 2-2	REZIC	MARIANNE	On leave		
11-7-50	11 am	G 2-22	FEJEROWICZ	ANNA	233 MARKET ST. WAHABALE		

Note that these registers are not indexed and to find your relatives you will need to have an idea of what year they were in the hostel or a lot of time.

## Conclusion

As I stated at the beginning this is far from a definitive guide but rather a brief outline to get you started. Go on to the archive websites and explore. Go into the Adelaide offices and ask the staff. See what you can find but remember that not all files survive, spelling (especially of surnames that were strange to Australian ears at that time) is always an issue and finally like all good archival research you will read a lot, perhaps only find a little, but hopefully you will gain some new information. GOOD LUCK!

## Other Places to Look

- Destination Australia - The National Archives is encouraging post-war migrants and their descendants to search for information and share their stories online in its new website *Destination: Australia – sharing our post-war migrant stories*. The website contains more than 20,000 photographs of post-war migrants from various countries. Go to <https://www.destinationaustralia.gov.au/site/> and explore.



- State Library of South Australia contains many oral histories, and other relevant documents such as those from organisations involved in hostels, for example the Good Neighbour Council as well as a copy of State and Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, Newspapers and a large number of books on migration and various migrant groups.
- The Migration Museum has stories, artefacts and other information to do with migrants and migration to South Australia as well as the Hostel Stories Exhibition (running until 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014)
- Trove – the National Library of Australia’s’ digitisation of newspaper project which is searchable by keyword including surnames and is a wonderful source for all historians and history lovers. <http://trove.nla.gov.au/>
- Websites and Groups/Forums
  - Migration Museum Flickr site <http://www.flickr.com/groups/migranthostels/>
  - Migration Museum Hostel Stories <http://migration.historysa.com.au/hostels>
  - Migrant Web <http://www.migrantweb.com/hostelsforum/>
  - Bonegilla <http://www.bonegilla.org.au/>
  - Enterprise <http://www.enterprisehostel.org/>

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