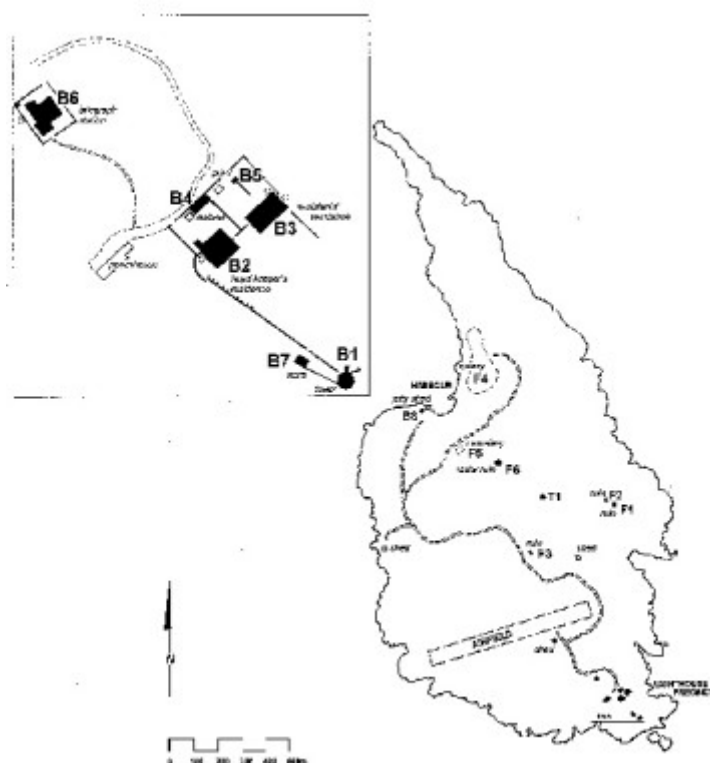


# Gabo Island Radar Station



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h01843 plan

## Location

GABO ISLAND, Unincorporated

## Municipality

UNINCORPORATED

## Level of significance

-

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1843

## Heritage Listing

Vic. War Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 9, 1999

What is significant?

The original decision to construct a lighthouse on Gabo Island flowed from discussions between Governors Gipps of New South Wales and Franklin of Van Diemen's Land in 1841 concerning the desirability of a system of lights to aid shipping through the difficult waters of Bass Strait. In 1848 a light was completed at Cape Otway but the construction of the original Gabo Island light was abandoned in the same year because of an unsuitable site. After the wreck of the SS Monumental City on nearby Tullaberga Island in 1853 a temporary wooden lighthouse was erected on the highest point of the island. The present lightstation, consisting of a tower and three residences, was constructed of the local pink granite in 1859-62 to the design of Victorian Public Works Department architect Charles Maplestone. In 1886-88 a telegraph operator's residence was constructed in mass concrete to the design of NSW Colonial Architect James Barnet. As well as activity connected with navigation, Gabo Island has a history of use as a sealing and whaling site, a source of fine building stone and as a Second World War radar station.

How is it significant?

The Gabo Island Lightstation is of historical, architectural and archaeological significance to the State of Victoria

Why is it significant?

Gabo Island Lightstation is historically significant as a key component in the original system of navigation aids planned for Bass Strait in 1841. The location of Gabo Island at one of the 'corners' of Australia adds to this significance. Of all the early lightstation in Victoria Gabo Island is the most intact retaining all its principal buildings. The telegraph building is of historical interest as an unusual example of a New South Wales government building on Victorian soil.

Gabo Island Lightstation is architecturally significant for the high standard of its building design attributed to Charles Maplestone. The tower itself is a remarkably well proportioned structure whose finely crafted pink granite is without parallel in Australia. The profile of the tower was replicated at all subsequent manned lighthouses in Victoria. The residences, with their typical protective walls, are similar to Maplestone's other work at Cape Schanck, Wilsons Promontory and Cape Otway but more finely detailed. The telegraph building is of architectural interest as an early (1886) use of mass concrete in a residential building and as the only concrete lightstation residence in Victoria.

Gabo Island, and in particular the area around the harbour, is of archaeological significance for the potential and known existence of artefactual remains from many important periods including aboriginal, early sealing and whaling, early lightstation, quarrying, later lightstation, military and maritime (shipwrecks).

Construction dates            1859,

Architect/Designer            Maplestone, Charles W,

Heritage Act Categories Registered place, Registered archaeological place,

Hermes Number 125258

Property Number

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## Physical Description 1

from Ivar Nelsen, Patrick Miller and Terry Sawyer Conservation Management Plan November 1992

The Lightstation encompasses all of Gabo Island. Gabo Island is formed of red porphyritic granite overlaid by sand dunes. The dunes are covered with vegetation consisting mainly of tea tree scrub. At the northern end of the island a sandspit is cut by a narrow channel some 200 to 300 metres wide separating the island from Telegraph Point on the mainland.

There is a small bay (known variously as Gabo Harbour, Santa Barbara Bay or Fitzroy Harbour) which offers reasonably safe, if uncomfortable, shelter for small craft in all but west to south west winds. There is a wooden jetty and a stone store. A groin made of cut granite blocks lies adjacent to abandoned quarry works.

A ridge of sand dunes to 50 metres lies in the centre of the island. South of this ridge where the land begins to flatten out an airstrip takes up virtually the whole width of the island.

On the south eastern tip of the island is the Lighthouse Precinct.

On the following plan drawings, two north arrows sometimes appear in the circle provided near the bar scale. The solid arrow is magnetic north and the dashed arrow is nominal north for the purpose of schedules and descriptions.

The Lighthouse Precinct occupies the south eastern tip of the island. It consists primarily of granite buildings which show a close harmony with the material of the island itself. The lighthouse (building 1) and store (building 6) are reached by a path which is protected from the wind by a high stone wall. The granite residences (buildings 2 & 3/4) with their outbuildings form a tight group in a lineal formation. At a little distance is the concrete former telegraph building (building 5). The radio room/garage/generator building (building 11) is a startlingly intrusive element.

The lighthouse is a coursed granite structure with a basement oil store and granite steps leading to the floor of the lighthouse. The tower terminates in a balcony with railing and the whole is surmounted with a Chance Brothers 1860 lantern. The lens apparatus is a small revolving unit illuminated by an electric lamp. Above this is a fixed light showing red sectors. Panels of the lantern house have been blanked out, particularly to landward.

Exterior

The head keeper's residence is a finely-crafted stone residence with both open and inbuilt verandahs to the north, south and west elevations. The most prominent features are the stone window heads to the paired windows and the stone chimneys.

The assistant keeper's residence is now a single residence but was originally constructed as a duplex. It is a finely-crafted rock-faced stone residence with both open and inbuilt verandahs to all elevations. The most prominent features are the stone window heads to the paired windows and the stone chimneys. The appearance has been altered externally through the addition of encircling verandahs and internally through the addition of sheet and batten walls over the original hard plaster surfaces.

The former telegraph station is a rendered concrete structure with hipped roofs to the house and verandah. It is different in appearance from the other residences due to the later date of construction. The verandah on three sides has unadorned timber posts with no decorative brackets.

The jetty shed is probably the oldest building on the island probably dating from the 1848 lighthouse construction. However, it has been added to and altered substantially and its integrity from that period is low. It is a simple rectangular granite building with little evidence of worked stone. Rather it incorporates water-worn beach stones and rubble.

There are two rubbish tips which are discernible. The northern tip is of recent (1980s) origin. The southern tip although older has been extensively disturbed. There may be other sites which have become covered with sand or vegetation.

#### Airfield

The 1972-3 airfield consists of a fenced grass strip 600m in length. There is a slight rise in the middle of the strip. The edges of the strip are marked with white cones. There is a wind-sock on a pole.

The post and rail stockyards adjoining the airstrip date from the 1970s.

#### Tank Farm

The granite quarries on Gabo Island can be categorised as commercial or lighthouse oriented. The commercial quarries, for export of stone, were at the northern end of the island near the groin and jetty. Two of the northern quarries, however, are more remote from sea transport and from their age may have been associated with the first (abandoned) lighthouse building of the 1840s. The southern quarry sites are around the base of the lighthouse and west of it and were almost certainly only used for getting stone for the building of the lightstation.

Near the base of the lighthouse is an area of considerable evidence of stone working. Small chips of granite lie thick on the ground indicating a place where the stone was dressed for building.

#### Incinerator

#### Archaeological Remnants

When large repair or construction projects were undertaken on the island works staff were housed in sheds near the earth dam. The only remnants consist of scattered debris, mainly bottles.

#### Gardens

The present garden and fowl shed dates from the early 1980s and is surrounded by a high mesh fence. There have been several other sites for gardens most notably "Happy Valley". This valley is watered by a spring and has some remnants of fencing and tanks. There are several mature fruit trees.

There are two overgrown stone ruins on a hill to the north east of the Lighthouse Precinct. The ruins are within about 30m of each other. Ruin 1 consists of a single room with a doorway, window and fireplace but has no roof structure. The walls of ruin 2 are in a worse condition than ruin 1 and although less of the buildings structure is evident it is still possible to say that it was the lesser of the two.

#### Monument

A granite obelisk was erected in nineteenth century in memory of the victims of the SS Monumental City wrecked on Tullabergo Island in 1853. The memorial was undermined by penguin burrows in its original position nearby and lay in pieces for many years. In 1963 it was repaired and re-erected in its present position concreted to a granite rock.

The cemetery is south of the jetty area and has four marked graves.

A concrete pad and steel spindle with part of the aerial are all that remain of a radar station erected c.1942 on the highest point of the island.

The only visible remnant of the 1853 wooden lighthouse is a 300mm square timber strut protruding from the sand on the highest point of the island near the remains of the Second World War radar station.

A groin of rough granite blocks extends some 20m into the sea from the commercial quarries on the north of the island.

A number of overgrown concrete pads and drainage channels are all that remain of buildings erected during the

Second World War to house service personnel connected with the radar station.

A cast and wrought iron anchor was retrieved from the wreck of the schooner Easby and left in the Lighthouse Precinct as a nautical curiosity.

There are remnants in many places on the island of the telegraph line which connected the lightstation with the mainland. The remnants are from various phases of the line which was replaced with a radio telephone link in the 1970s

## **Physical Conditions**

There is a high level of archaeological potential on Gabo Island with remains from all significant eras: sealing, quarrying, two phases of lighthouse building and World War 2. State of the Historic Environment survey report - poor condition. See Events.

## **Usage/Former Usage**

1859-1862 ; navigation aid ;

## **Veterans Description for Public**

The former RAAF No.16 Radar Station on Gabo Island is one of only five radar stations constructed in Victoria during the Second World War. It is a typical example of the radar stations which formed part of a chain of such facilities established on Australia's coastline in the Second World War.

No.16 Radar Station is a reminder of the increased presence and activities of the military in East Gippsland during the Second World War, and of the Australian Defence Forces' response to threat of direct enemy aggression and possible invasion. The Radar Station was of particular strategic importance during the Second World War because of its location on the eastern most tip of Victoria on one of the largest and most isolated parts of Australia's south eastern coastline. This section of coast formed part of an important shipping route and was thought to be a potential target for aggressive enemy action, particularly with increased military activity in the Pacific Region after Japan entered the war in 1941. The Radar Station provided coastal surveillance of possible enemy sea or air action and was considered an important part of measures necessary to ensure the safety of the shipping route.

The initial military installation on Gabo Island during the Second World War was based at the existing light station and operated as a Navy War Signal Station. The Station was manned by Navy signalmen and its main function was coastal surveillance. One of the light station residences was commandeered by the Navy for the accommodation of Naval personnel. This residence also provided accommodation for Navy personnel recuperating from injuries and trauma resulting from extended active service overseas.

In late 1942 and early 1943 large numbers of RAAF personnel arrived on the island and established the Radar Station. As many as 250 to 300 RAAF personnel are believed to have been stationed on the island at one time. The actual mechanism was set up on the highest point of the island with an asbestos cement hut located to one side. This area was enclosed by a fence. The Radar Station was treated as a top security military installation and was subject to a 24 hour guard. The camp for RAAF personnel was located on the North West shore of the island, along the beach near the present jetty.

## **Extent of Registration**

1. All of the buildings and features marked as follows on Diagram 1843 held by the Executive Director:

B1 Lighthouse and associated stone walls

B2 Head Lightkeeper's Residence and associated stone walls

B3 Assistant Lightkeepers' Residences and associated stone walls

B4 Stables

B5 Privy

B6 Telegraph Operator's Residence and associated concrete walls and privy

B7 Store

B8 Jetty Shed  
F1,F2 & F3 Ruins of stone buildings  
F4 Quarry and associated stone groin  
F5 Cemetery  
F6 Ruins of radar and early wooden lighthouse  
F7 Monument to the wreck of the SS Monumental City  
T1 Pear Tree (Pyrus cv.)

2. All of the land comprising Gabo Island as shown on Diagram 1843 held by the Executive Director being the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 5833 Folio 464 and including all archaeological relics and deposits.

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*