

# WILLIAM COOPER RESIDENCE, SOUTHAMPTON STREET



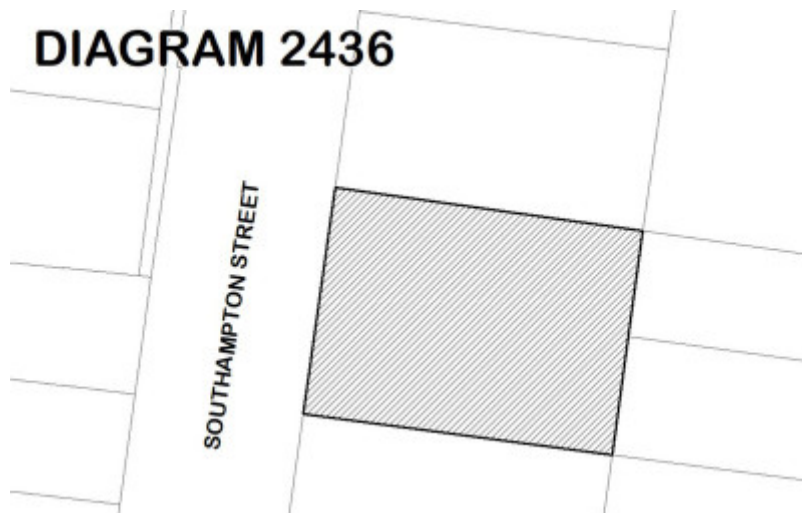
front late 2022



front early 2022 real estate photo



Aerial 2023



Extent diagram 2023

## Location

73 SOUTHAMPTON STREET FOOTSCRAY, MARIBYRNONG CITY

## Municipality

MARIBYRNONG CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2436

## VHR Registration

June 8, 2023

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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### Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 18, 2023

#### What is significant?

The William Cooper Residence, Southampton Street, a modest double-fronted Edwardian-era weatherboard house at 73 Southampton Street Footscray.

#### How is it significant?

The William Cooper Residence, Southampton Street is of historical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criteria for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

## Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

## Criterion B

Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

## Criterion G

Strong or special association with a particular present-day community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

## Criterion H

Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

#### Why is it significant?

The William Cooper Residence, Southampton Street is historically significant for its association with early twentieth-century Aboriginal activism. Yorta Yorta man William Cooper established the Australian Aborigines' League (AAL) in Melbourne in the early 1930s and ran the organisation from a series of rented houses in which

he and his family lived in the Footscray area. Cooper's last house was at 73 Southampton Street where he lived and led the League from January 1938 to November 1940 before returning to Yorta Yorta country. His time at Southampton Street saw the culmination of his political work and the organisation of important events in the history of early twentieth-century activism, including the 6 December 1938 deputation to the German Consulate in Collins Street to deliver a protest letter against the oppression of Jewish people by the Nazi regime. On 26 January 1938 the AAL staged the 'Day of Mourning' with the New South Wales Aborigines Progressive Association, to coincide with the sesquicentenary (150th) anniversary celebrations of the arrival of the British. This event is widely understood to be the forerunner to the present-day NAIDOC week celebrations. [Criterion A]

The William Cooper Residence, Southampton Street is rare in Victoria as a place which demonstrates early twentieth-century Aboriginal activism. Few places and objects survive which demonstrate this history including those related to the Australian Aborigines' League and activists like William Cooper. [Criterion B]

The William Cooper Residence, Southampton Street is of social significance to Victoria's Aboriginal communities. The history of early twentieth-century Aboriginal activism has become strongly identified with community memories of William Cooper's involvement in the 1938 Australian Aborigines' League deputation from 73 Southampton Street to the German Consulate. Re-enactments of this event involving the Jewish community in 2012 and 2018 have increased its significance. The episode has become a powerful part of Victoria's Aboriginal history and speaks to the contemporary endeavours of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities to fight racism against all cultural groups. [Criterion G]

The William Cooper Residence, Southampton Street is historically significant for its association with Aboriginal activist William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines' League. Cooper was a pivotal figure in early twentieth-century Aboriginal activism in Victoria and Australia. Between January 1938 and November 1940, the northwest bedroom of the house was also his office from which he conducted his political work, holding AAL meetings and writing letters by candlelight in the evenings. Cooper influenced generations of subsequent Aboriginal leaders and political figures. The League was a one of the most important Aboriginal organisations in the history of Aboriginal activism in Victoria and Australia in the twentieth century. [Criterion H]

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

**Places of worship:** In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must [notify](#) the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

**Subdivision/consolidation:** Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

## **Specific Exemptions:**

### **Specific Permit Exemptions**

The below permit exemptions are not considered to cause harm to the cultural heritage significance of the William Cooper Residence, Southampton Street subject to the guidelines and conditions that follow.

### **Exempt works and activities**

#### **Main House - Front exterior including verandah**

- 1) Painting of previously painted surfaces in the same colour, finish and product type provided that preparation or painting does not remove all evidence of earlier paint finishes or schemes.
- 2) Repairs, and like for like replacement of weatherboards, the verandah, front fence, front gate and front security grille door.
- 3) Repairs, resurfacing or replacement of the driveway in existing or new materials.
- 4) The processes of gardening including pruning, mulching, fertilising, removal of dead or diseased plants, replanting of existing garden beds, disease and weed control and maintenance to care for existing plants.

#### **Garage (c.1960s) and Carport (c.>1960s)**

- 5) Like for like repairs to garage exterior, all internal works, and demolition.
- 6) Like for like repairs to carport and demolition.

#### *Main House - Front interior (Bedrooms 1 & 2 and entry hallway)*

- 7) Minor repairs and maintenance which replaces like with like.
- 8) Painting of previously painted surfaces provided that preparation or painting does not remove all evidence of earlier paint finishes or schemes.
- 9) Installation, removal or replacement of carpets and other floor coverings.
- 10) Maintenance, removal, repair and replacement of light fittings, ceiling fans, fixtures, light switches and related elements in existing locations.
- 11) Removal and/or replacement of power outlets, and installation of new ones.
- 12) Removal and/or replacement of hooks, brackets and the like for hanging wall mounted artworks and signs, and installation of new ones.
- 13) Repair, removal and replacement of curtains, pelmets and blinds, and installation of new ones.
- 14) Installation, removal or replacement of existing electrical wiring. If wiring is currently exposed, it should remain exposed. If it is fully concealed it should remain fully concealed.
- 15) Removal or replacement of smoke and fire detectors, alarms and the like, of the same size and in existing locations.

#### *Main House – Addition (c.2000s) living room, dining room, bathroom/laundry, kitchen*

- 6) All works and alterations within the interiors of the living room, dining room, bathroom/laundry and kitchen.

#### *Main house - ceiling space, roof, external services*

- 16) Installation, removal or replacement of bulk insulation in the roof space.
- 17) Installation of services and plant (service equipment) within the roof space, providing that it does not impact on the external appearance of the building or involve structural changes.
- 18) Repair, removal and like for like replacement of roof and solar panels.
- 19) Repair to, or removal of items such as antennae, aerials, and air conditioners and associated pipe work, ducting and wiring.
- 20) Maintenance, repair and replacement of existing external services such as plumbing, electrical cabling, surveillance systems, pipes or fire services which does not involve changes in location or scale.

#### *Boundary fences (north, south and east)*

18) Repair, removal and replacement of the north, south and east fences at the boundaries of the property.

#### *Rear patio area and awning*

19) All works within the patio footprint.

20) Demolition.

#### *Detached studio at rear (1980s)*

21) All external and internal works to the detached studio at the rear, including rebuilding, provided that the envelope of the structure is not enlarged.

22) Demolition.

#### *Garden area at southern side of the house*

23) Repair, removal and replacement of the existing water tank.

24) The processes of gardening including pruning, mulching, fertilising, removal of dead or diseased plants, replanting of existing garden beds, establishment of new garden beds, planting of new plants, disease and weed control and maintenance to care for plants.

25) Repair, removal and like for like replacement of hard landscaping elements.

#### *Backyard area (rear of house)*

26) The processes of gardening including pruning, mulching, fertilising, removal of dead or diseased plants, replanting of existing garden beds, establishment of new garden beds, planting of new plants, disease and weed control and maintenance to care for plants.

27) All hard landscaping.

#### *Emergency works*

28) Works or activities, including emergency stabilisation, necessary to secure safety in an emergency where a structure or part of a structure has been irreparably damaged or destabilised and poses a safety risk to its users or the public. The Executive Director must be notified within seven days of the commencement of these works or activities.

## **Guidelines**

1. Where there is an inconsistency between permit exemptions specific to the registered place or object ('specific exemptions') established in accordance with either section 49(3) or section 92(3) of the *Heritage Act 2017* (Vic) and general exemptions established in accordance with section 92(1) of the *Heritage Act 2017* (Vic) specific exemptions will prevail to the extent of any inconsistency.
2. In specific exemptions, words have the same meaning as in the *Heritage Act 2017* (Vic), unless otherwise indicated. Where there is an inconsistency between specific exemptions and the *Heritage Act 2017* (Vic), the *Heritage Act 2017* (Vic) will prevail to the extent of any inconsistency.
3. Nothing in specific exemptions obviates the responsibility of a proponent to obtain the consent of the owner of the registered place or object, or if the registered place or object is situated on Crown Land the land manager as defined in the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* (Vic), prior to undertaking works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions.
4. If a Cultural Heritage Management Plan in accordance with the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic) is required for works covered by specific exemptions, specific exemptions will apply only if the Cultural Heritage Management Plan has been approved prior to works or activities commencing. Where there is an inconsistency between specific exemptions and a Cultural Heritage Management Plan for the relevant works and activities, Heritage Victoria must be contacted for advice on the appropriate approval pathway.
5. Specific exemptions do not constitute approvals, authorisations or exemptions under any other legislation, Local Government, State Government or Commonwealth Government requirements, including but not limited to the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (Vic), the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic), and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth). Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to obtain relevant planning, building or environmental approvals from the responsible authority where applicable.
6. Care should be taken when working with heritage buildings and objects, as historic fabric may contain dangerous and poisonous materials (for example lead paint and asbestos). Appropriate personal protective

equipment should be worn at all times. If you are unsure, seek advice from a qualified heritage architect, heritage consultant or local Council heritage advisor.

7. The presence of unsafe materials (for example asbestos, lead paint etc) at a registered place or object does not automatically exempt remedial works or activities in accordance with this category. Approvals under Part 5 of the *Heritage Act 2017* (Vic) must be obtained to undertake works or activities that are not expressly exempted by the below specific exemptions.

8. A Conservation Management Plan will assist in the future management of the cultural heritage values of the place.

## Conditions

1. All works or activities permitted under specific exemptions must be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents harm to the registered place or object. Harm includes moving, removing or damaging any part of the registered place or object that contributes to its cultural heritage significance.

2. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the registered place are revealed relating to its cultural heritage significance, including but not limited to historical archaeological remains, such as features, deposits or artefacts, then works must cease and Heritage Victoria notified as soon as possible.

3. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any Aboriginal cultural heritage is discovered or exposed at any time, all works must cease and the Secretary (as defined in the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic)) must be contacted immediately to ascertain requirements under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic).

4. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any munitions or other potentially explosive artefacts are discovered, Victoria Police is to be immediately alerted and the site is to be immediately cleared of all personnel.

5. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any suspected human remains are found the works or activities must cease. The remains must be left in place and protected from harm or damage. Victoria Police and the State Coroner's Office must be notified immediately. If there are reasonable grounds to believe that the remains are Aboriginal, the State Emergency Control Centre must be immediately notified on 1300 888 544, and, as required under s.17(3)(b) of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic), all details about the location and nature of the human remains must be provided to the Secretary (as defined in the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic)).

## Theme

2. Peopling Victoria's places and landscapes 7. Governing Victorians 8. Building community life

Construction dates 1900,

Heritage Act  
Categories Registered place,

Other Names COOPER HOUSE, AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES' LEAGUE, WILLIAM COOPER HOME, WILLIAM COOPER HOUSE,

Hermes Number 208949

Property Number

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## History

# William Cooper's life before 1933

Yorta Yorta man William Cooper (1860-1941) was a mobilising force in the fight for Aboriginal rights and a pivotal figure in twentieth-century Australian history. Many regard him as a founder of the Aboriginal civil rights movement. He was born in the vicinity of the Moira Lakes, a large wetland surrounded by river red gum forests near the junction of the Murray and Goulburn rivers, only a few decades after the first colonists had arrived in the region. Decimated by imported diseases, and no longer able to live their traditional lifestyle and practice culture due to dispossession of their ancestral lands, the Yorta Yorta people were living in makeshift camps on the fringes of pastoral stations and nearby towns such as Echuca. For those such as Cooper's mother, who became known by the English name of Kitty Lewis, daily life was a struggle for survival.

By 1860 the land surrounding the lakes formed part of Moira Station, a large pastoral leasehold owned at that time by prominent Victorian politician and businessman Sir John O'Shanassy. As an eight-year-old boy Cooper was taken to Melbourne by O'Shanassy, and worked as a stable hand at a city hotel owned by O'Shanassy while living at the family mansion in Camberwell. At age eleven he was returned to the Moira area and began earning money by labouring on nearby stations such as Moira and Ulupna.

In 1874 Maloga Aboriginal Mission was founded by missionaries Daniel and Janet Matthews on the NSW side of the Murray River near present-day Moama. That same year Cooper, together with his mother Kitty, several siblings and other Yorta Yorta kinfolk, moved to Maloga from the surrounding camps. Offering food, shelter and basic education to the Aboriginal residents, Maloga had a profound influence on Cooper and his family. It was also where Cooper first learned basic literacy and converted to Christianity. Possessing labouring skills that were in demand across the colonies, Cooper often sought employment off the mission and spent the next decade shearing, droving and labouring in central and western Victoria and New South Wales. Cooper joined the Australian Workers' Union, for which he became a spokesperson for Aboriginal shearers.

Shortly after his return to Maloga in 1884 he married Annie Murri and started a family, with his first child Emma Cooper (later known as Emily) born in 1885. Along with the other Maloga residents, around 1888 Cooper and his young family moved to the nearby Cummeragunja Mission, which had been newly established by the NSW Aborigines Protection Board on land adjacent to Maloga. Cooper first became active in agitating for government grants of land to the Aboriginal residents at Maloga and Cummeragunja, utilising petitions to influence government agencies and by writing letters to local newspapers.

An outbreak of typhoid at Cummeragunja caused Cooper to suffer the loss of his second child Bartlett Cooper, only six months old, and shortly thereafter his first wife Annie, early in 1889. Cooper remained at Cummeragunja and married his second wife, Agnes Hamilton of Coranderrk Station near Healesville, in 1893. While also working away from the mission from time to time, Cooper farmed one of the modest twenty-acre pieces of land that had been granted to the Aboriginal families residing there as a result of their lobbying efforts. When those grants of land were later revoked and instead allocated to white farmers, and with conditions on the mission becoming increasingly harsh, Cooper departed Cummeragunja around 1906 with his second wife Agnes and five of his children - Jessie Cooper, Daniel Cooper, Gillison Cooper, Amy Cooper and Lynch Cooper.

After building a makeshift house for his family on the Victorian side of the Murray a few miles upstream from Cummeragunja, in the Barmah Forest adjacent to the lakes, Cooper supported his family by catching fish for local sale. After the birth of his daughter Moira Sarah Cooper (later known as Sally Cooper) in 1907, Cooper tragically lost his second wife Agnes to tuberculosis in 1909. Around 1912 he took his children to live at Yarrawonga where he and his sons continued fishing, for a time operating a fish shop in Yarrawonga's main street. He returned to Barmah in 1923, again building a makeshift house on the banks of the Murray River, this time directly across from Cummeragunja. He married his third wife, Sarah Nelson (nee McRae), in 1928. Cooper maintained strong family and community links with the residents still living at Cummeragunja during the decades following his departure. Witnessing the increasingly poor conditions and oppressive treatment being inflicted on the mission residents helped to shape his later political activity.

## **Footscray and the Australian Aborigines' League (AAL)**

In 1933, at the age of 72, Cooper and wife Sarah left Barmah and moved to the working-class suburb of Footscray where he became a prominent figure among Melbourne's Aboriginal community. From 1933 Cooper

began to organise a political group which by 1935 was known as the Australian Aborigines' League (AAL), formalising a network of people from Cummeragunja who had been working together for several years. The AAL acquired a slogan: 'A fair deal for the dark race' which appeared on their letterhead.

The AAL has been described as one of the most important Aboriginal political organisations in Australia. Notably, full membership rights were available only to those of Aboriginal descent. Being Aboriginal controlled meant that, unlike other groups seeking to improve conditions for Aboriginal people during that era, the AAL was the first organisation demanding justice for Aboriginal people in their own voice and on their own terms.

Although based in Melbourne, it was a national organisation which lobbied state and federal governments for improved rights and conditions for Aboriginal people around Australia, including in Central Australia and the Northern Territory. The group was less active after Cooper's death but revived after the Second World War by Douglas Nicholls, Eric Onus and Bill Onus. The Australian Aborigines' League became defunct during World War II but was revived in 1944-45 by Cooper's protegee Doug Nicholls and by Bill Onus. In 1957 its role was largely assumed by a new organisation, the Aborigines' Advancement League, also known as the 'AAL'.<sup>[1]</sup> In this report the acronym AAL refers to the Australian Aborigines' League founded by William Cooper in the 1930s, unless otherwise stated.

Cooper demonstrated remarkable political acumen through his activities as the leader of the AAL. He was supported by other AAL members including Douglas Nicholls, Margaret Tucker, Shadrach James, Hyllus Briggs, brothers Bill and Eric Onus, Anna and Caleb Morgan, Martha Nevin, Ebenezer Lovett, Annie Lovett, Cooper's son Lynch and his third wife Sarah, and non-Aboriginal allies including Helen Baillie and Arthur Burdeu.<sup>[2]</sup> Cooper was a prolific letter writer to government officials and newspapers, lobbying politicians and raising public awareness about issues affecting Aboriginal people.<sup>[3]</sup> He spoke publicly about Aboriginal rights at Speakers Corner (VHR H1363) on the Yarra River, a significant place in the history of progressive political thought and activism in Victoria.

Several of Cooper's projects continue to inspire and inform First Nations political activism today. These include the 'Day of Mourning' event of 26 January 1938, held in conjunction with fellow Aboriginal activists William Ferguson and Jack Patten of the NSW-based Aborigines' Progressive Association, an event widely understood to be the forerunner to the present-day NAIDOC week celebrations. Arguably Cooper's most cherished project, and the one to which he devoted most of his time and energy, was his 'Petition to the King' seeking Aboriginal representation in Federal Parliament. The Uluru Statement from the Heart, and the desire to establish an Indigenous 'Voice to Parliament', demonstrate that this issue remains firmly on the agenda for Aboriginal Australians.

In addition to their significant social justice activism on behalf of Aboriginal people, the AAL deputation to the German consulate to protest the persecution of Jews following the events of Kristallnacht is an event for which Cooper and the AAL are widely celebrated.

William Cooper was Honorary Secretary of the AAL and ran the organisation from his home. Neither Cooper nor the League owned property, and from 1933 the AAL's headquarters were in a series of workers cottages rented by Cooper as his residence in the Footscray area. These were in Ballarat Road, Federal Street, Mackay Street and Southampton Street (listed below). Letters from Cooper to government agencies held at the National Archives of Australia (NAA) and Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), as well as research conducted by Monash University scholars, allow us to link specific political activities with particular addresses in Footscray.<sup>[4]</sup> Some of this information has not been easily accessible until recent years. It should be noted that the existence and/or location of any surviving AAL archives is unclear. The whereabouts of Cooper's Petition to the King (1937) and his letter to the German Consul, Dr Drechsler (1938) are also unknown.

## Timeline of William Cooper's Residences in Footscray



### **111 Ballarat Road, Footscray**

In early 1932, William Cooper, with his third wife Sarah, moved to Melbourne and stayed at the home of his daughter and son-in-law (Auntie Sally Russell Cooper, and her husband Uncle Mick Russell). This house was demolished 2019-20.

### **120 Ballarat Road, Footscray**

William Cooper resided here from 16 July 1933 to around Nov 1934 or March 1935. In September 1933 Cooper started gathering signatures for a Petition to the King. Begins work to seek Aboriginal parliamentary representation, enfranchisement and land rights. On 23 February 1935 he led the first Aboriginal deputation to a Commonwealth minister.

### **24 Federal Street, Footscray**

William Cooper resided here from March 1935 to May 1937. This house was demolished sometime around the 1970s.

### **111 Ballarat Road, Footscray**

William Cooper resided here from May 1937 to June 1937. This was Auntie Sally Russell Cooper's home. See above. This house was demolished 2019-20.

### **43 Mackay Street, Seddon (now Yarraville)**

William Cooper resided here from 16 June 1937 to January 1938. In August 1937 he sent the Petition to the King (see above) to Prime Minister Joseph Lyons in the hope that he would forward it to King George VI. On 12 November 1937, William Cooper called a meeting of leading Aboriginal activists to plan the 'Day of Mourning' on 26 January 1938, in association with the New South Wales Aborigines Progressive Association.

### **73 Southampton Street, Footscray**

William Cooper resided here from 19 January 1938 to November 1940. On 26 January 1938 the AAL staged the 'Day of Mourning' with the New South Wales Aborigines Progressive Association, to coincide with the sesquicentenary (150th) anniversary celebrations of the arrival of the British. On 31 January 1938, members of the AAL (not including Cooper) led a delegation to Prime Minister Joseph Lyons to call for federal control of Aboriginal affairs and presented a proposed national policy for Aboriginal people. On 6 December 1938, there was an AAL delegation to the German Consulate at 425 Collins Street (VHR H0421) to deliver a letter that condemned the Nazi government's treatment of Jewish people. On 4 February 1939 the Cummeraganja Walk-off occurred. The AAL provided advice and support for Aboriginal people involved in this significant event.

### **Return to Yorta Yorta country**

In Nov 1940, Cooper returned to live at Mooroopna, Yorta Yorta country, with his wife Sarah. On 29 Mar 1941, Cooper died and was buried at Cummeragunja.

## **Activities at Southampton Street**

Southampton Street was the last house in which William Cooper lived and worked in Melbourne from January 1938 to November 1940. It was the site of organising of some important events and saw the culmination of his political activities in Melbourne with the AAL. While living at Southampton Street, William Cooper conducted the business of the AAL from the northern bedroom (Bedroom 1) writing letters, planning activities and holding meetings with AAL members.<sup>[5]</sup> On 26 January 1938 the AAL staged the 'Day of Mourning' with the New South Wales Aborigines Progressive Association, to coincide with the sesquicentenary (150th) anniversary celebrations of the arrival of the British.<sup>[6]</sup> On 31 January 1938 members of the AAL (not including Cooper) led a delegation to Prime Minister Joseph Lyons to call for federal control of Aboriginal affairs and presented a proposed national policy for Aboriginal people.<sup>[7]</sup> Also from Southampton Street, Cooper and the AAL provided advice and support for Aboriginal people involved in the Cummeraganja Walk Off which occurred on 4 February 1939. What some regard as one of the most important events in Cooper's political life took place while William Cooper was living at Southampton Street.

# The 1938 Deputation to the German Consulate

## *Written historical records*

The written historical record relating to the AAL deputation of 6 December 1938 to the German Consulate at 425 Collins Street is limited, consisting of only a few short accounts in newspapers. The *Argus* reported on 3 December that 'at a meeting of the Australian Aborigines' League a resolution was passed voicing, on behalf of the Aborigines of Australia, a strong protest against the cruel persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazi Government'.<sup>[8]</sup> It also stated that 'a deputation of aborigines who are members of the league will wait on the German Consul... to present the resolution and ask him to convey it to his government'. The *Workers' Weekly* later reported that the AAL's actions were to 'protest against the pogroms' being the violence perpetrated by Nazi supporters on Jewish people on *Kristallnacht* of 9-10 November.<sup>[9]</sup> On 1 December 1938, six days before the deputation, William Ferguson, the leader of the Aborigines' Progressive Association in New South Wales, sent a telegram of support to the AAL, indicating that there was an awareness and support of the Victorian action in at least one other state.<sup>[10]</sup>

On 7 December, the day after the deputation, the *Argus* reported that the that the AAL deputation was 'refused admittance' to the German Consulate.<sup>[11]</sup> Further, it noted that the AAL resolution condemned both the persecution of Jews and Christians in Germany'.<sup>[12]</sup> The *Workers' Weekly* subsequently published extracts from the resolution: 'Like the Jews, our people have suffered cruelty and exploitation as a national minority, but we are glad to say that we are now experiencing more kindness, sympathy and co-operation from the white population of Australia... We are a poor people, and few in numbers, but in extending our sympathy to the Jewish race we also pledge ourselves to help them by all means in our power'.<sup>[13]</sup> Unable to personally deliver the resolution to Dr RW Drechsler, the Consul, the *Argus* reported that 'a letter [from the AAL] requesting Dr Drechsler to forward the resolution to his government was left at the consulate'.<sup>[14]</sup> This letter is called a 'petition' in some secondary sources.<sup>[15]</sup>

## *Family memory and oral testimony*

The oral testimony of Cooper's descendants provides additional dimensions to the written accounts of the 1938 deputation and its relationship to Southampton Street. Yorta Yorta Elder Uncle Alf Turner, better known as Uncle Boydie, is William Cooper's grandson and was born in 1928. Around 1935-36 he joined his grandparents at Southampton Street, and shared the southeast bedroom, currently the dining room, with his cousin Bruce.<sup>[16]</sup> Uncle Boydie recalls opening the door to AAL members and meetings being held in 'grandfather's room' by candlelight.<sup>[17]</sup> He often walked with Cooper, carrying his books and a little stool, to the Yarra Bank (VHR H13613) where Cooper spoke about Aboriginal rights to audiences along with a range of political activists. Uncle Boydie notes that AAL members were relatively poor, and that the 1938 deputation was less a 'protest march' than a long walk to avoid tram fares.<sup>[18]</sup>

Uncle Boydie is one of the last living links to William Cooper, and has recorded radio and video testimony of his grandfather's early life and political activism:

- ABC Soul Search (May 2020) (From 38:40 mins] Reconciliation as a pilgrimage to justice <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/soul-search/may-31-2020-reconciliation-as-a-pilgrimage-to-justice/12296588>
- ABC Compass Program (12 April 2020) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fhg2JljOKGg>

The 1938 delegation was likely inspired by similar actions of left-wing and pacifist groups seeking to draw public attention to increasing persecution of Jewish people and other minorities by the Nazi regime.<sup>[19]</sup> In addition to voicing concern about the poor treatment of Jewish people, which Cooper and his colleagues would undoubtedly have found appalling, the AAL protest was also a way to draw attention to the plight of Aboriginal people and the hypocrisy of those Australians voicing concern about the treatment of Jewish people in Europe given the continuing oppression and racial segregation of Australia's original occupants.

## Rented headquarters

Aboriginal activists of the early twentieth century did not have the resources to purchase their own headquarters. This was also the situation for other socially and economically marginalised activist groups. Unable to vote, and subject to a range of legislative controls, discrimination in employment and racism on a daily basis, it was cheaper and easier for AAL members to meet at Cooper's home. Tenants like Cooper had little stability in their housing and were subject to uncertain tenure and rental regulations which forbade them to permanently alter the fabric of the house.

The Southampton Street house was a modest four-roomed rented home that served as Cooper's residence as well as being a hub for political activism and a sphere for family caregiving. While undertaking his political work, Cooper and his wife Sarah cared for a number of their grandchildren at Southampton Street for various reasons. These included Alfred Turner (Uncle Boydie), the three siblings - Cyril, Esmay and Bruce Mann, and twins Edward (Ted) and William (Bill) Cooper.

The residence at Southampton Street was built between c.1900 and 1917. Planning documents from the City of Maribyrnong show that the Garage was built in 1969, the detached studio was constructed during the 1980s, and the house size was substantially increased in 2001 when an addition was built onto the rear (containing a new kitchen and bathroom).

## William Cooper's Legacy

Today, William Cooper is strongly identified with the 1938 deputation from Southampton Street to the German Consulate. Cooper's solidarity with European Jewish people is particularly striking as an act of international anti-racism by an Aboriginal leader, himself working to gain rights for Australia's first nation's people. Cooper's insistence on handing over the protest letter was an important act of international solidarity against racism. It is a significant aspect of Cooper's great political legacy.

Knowledge of William Cooper's activism is increasing in Victoria, in part due to re-enactments of the 1938 deputation. On 6 December 2012, Cooper's grandson Uncle 'Boydie' Turner, with family members, Aboriginal community members, Jewish people, Christians, Germans and other supporters, re-enacted the 1938 deputation from Southampton Street. Uncle Boydie presented a replica of his grandfather's letter to the German Consul, and it was accepted. This was widely publicised and built on a similar re-enactment in 2010 by Cooper's great-grandson, Kevin Russell. A re-enactment also took place in December 2018 on the 80th anniversary of the event.

Described as a man ahead of his time, William Cooper inspired and mentored a new generation of Aboriginal leaders, including Douglas Nicholls, Bill Onus, Eric Onus and Margaret Tucker. In the last fifteen years William Cooper has become better known in Australia as he has been honoured in various forms:

- The installation of a plaque at the Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre, Melbourne (2002)
- The planting of seventy Australian trees in Israel to honour William Cooper's deputation (2008)
- The opening of the William Cooper Justice Centre in William Street, Melbourne (2010)
- The opening of the William Cooper pedestrian bridge at Footscray Railway Station (2010)
- The establishment of a memorial garden to William Cooper at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum (2010)
- The induction of William Cooper into the Victorian Aboriginal Roll of Honour (2011)
- The completion of a mural in Shepparton depicting William Cooper and Douglas Nicholls (2017)
- The unveiling of a William Cooper Memorial Statue in Shepparton (2018)
- The renaming the Federal Seat of Batman to the Federal Seat of Cooper by the Australian Electoral Commission (2018).

### Selected bibliography

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Broome, Richard *Aboriginal Australians*, Allen & Unwin, 1982 (2019).

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Eidelson, Meyer *Melbourne Dreaming: A Guide to Important Places of the Past and Present*, Aboriginal Studies Press, 1997.

## Family contacts

The Executive Director thanks the following people for contributing their knowledge and information to the assessment process:

- Uncle Alf Turner, Cooper's grandson (known as Uncle Boydie), in person meeting 5 October 2022.
- Leonie Drummond, William Cooper's great-granddaughter, 5 October 2022
- David Jago, William Cooper's great-great-grandson, 5 October 2022, and subsequent discussions and email exchanges into December 2022.
- Professor Bain Attwood for his submission to the Heritage Council of Victoria.

## Endnotes

[1] Bain Attwood, [Australian Aborigines' League](#), entry in e-Melbourne: the City Past and Present Encyclopedia of Melbourne, accessed 3 April 2023; Richard Broome's history of the Aboriginal Advancement League, *Victims or Victors? The story of the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1985.

[2] Bain Attwood, *William Cooper*, p. 203.

[3] See collected letters in Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus, *Thinking Black*.

[4] See: NAA F126,12; NAA A659, 1940/1/858; NAA A432,1937/1191; NAA A431, 1949/1591, and the [William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines' League](#) website particularly [Cooper's Political Work](#), Monash University, compiled by Bain Attwood.

[5] Interview with Uncle Alf Turner (known as Uncle Boydie), Shepparton, 5 October 2022.

[6] See [The 1938 Day of Mourning](#), AIATSIS [accessed 26 October 2022].

[7] See [William Cooper Protests](#), National Museum of Australia [accessed 26 October 2022].

[8] 'Deputation Not Admitted', *Argus*, 7 December 1938, p.3.

[9] 'Aborigines' Protest: Cruelty to Jews', *Workers' Weekly*, 20 Dec 1938, p.3.

[10] 'Cruelty to Jews' *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate*, p.6.

[11] 'Deputation Not Admitted', *Argus*, 7 December 1938, p.3.

[12] 'Deputation Not Admitted', *Argus*, 7 December 1938, p.3.

[13] 'Aborigines' Protest: Cruelty to Jews', *Workers' Weekly*, 20 Dec 1938, p.3.

[14] 'Deputation Not Admitted', *Argus*, 7 December 1938, p.3. Also see 'News in Brief', *Age*, 7 Dec 1938, p.10.

[15] 'Cruelty to Jews', *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate*, 1 December 1938, p. 6.

[16] Interview with Uncle Boydie, Shepparton, 5 October 2022.

[17] Interview with Uncle Alf Turner (known as Uncle Boydie), Shepparton, 5 October 2022. Similar accounts can be found at ['William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines' League'](#), [Monash](#) University.

[18] Interview with Uncle Alf Turner (known as Uncle Boydie), Shepparton, 5 October 2022. For reports of AAL activities on the Yarra Bank, see 'Aborigines' Plea', *Argus*, 9 May 1938, p.9; 'Aborigines', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 May 1938, p.12

[19] See 'Treatment of Jews Protest Left for Consul', *Argus*, 18 Nov 1938, Page 11; 'Letter to Consul', *Argus*, 22 September 1938, p.13.

## Extent of Registration

### NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 2017**, I give notice under section 53 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including a place in the Heritage Register:

Number: H2436

Category: Registered Place

Name: William Cooper Residence, Southampton Street

Location: 73 Southampton Street Footscray

Municipality: Maribyrnong City

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 2436 encompassing all of Lot 1 on Title Plan 697428.

Dated 8 June 2023

STEVEN AVERY

Executive Director

*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/>*