

# Change and Continuity

## Investigation 1

### INVESTIGATING CHANGES IN IMMIGRATION AND AT BONEGILLA FROM 1947 - 1971



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## Introduction

In the immediate post-war years, Australia launched a bold immigration program to increase the size of its population: a large workforce would boost economic development more people could better defend the country. Unable to attract sufficient British migrants, whom it preferred, Australia offered assisted passage to displaced persons from war-torn Europe, provided they contracted to work for two years in allocated employment.

When the flow of wartime refugees slowed, Australia negotiated migration agreements with several European nations and then launched a more general assisted passage scheme to attract migrants from a wider range of countries. It also opened its doors to refugee groups, such as Hungarians and Czechoslovaks fleeing Cold War changes in the 1950s and 1960s. The displaced, the assisted and the refugees were to meet Australia's ongoing needs for labour through a long-term economic boom in the 1950s and 1960s. The population of Australia increased from 7.5 million to 12.5 million between 1947 and 1971.

Changes at the Bonegilla Reception Centre are best viewed by comparing the place at its beginning and at its end: 'The Bonegilla experiment, 1948-1951' and 'Receiving migrant workers, 1960-1971'. A specially prepared video draws out some of the continuities. Three popular magazine stories point to the ways the Australian public was given favourable impressions of the reception centre and the job it was doing at its beginning and towards its end.



## Key Inquiry Questions

- What changed and what did not change in immigration policy between 1947 and 1971?
- How did the Bonegilla Reception Centre change to adapt to shifts in immigration policy and community attitudes between 1947 and 1971?
- How did the Australian Government try to keep the electorate supportive of its large-scale immigration program between 1947 and 1971?



### 'Welcome to work in Australia'

Watch this introduction to the Bonegilla Reception Centre which explains how Bonegilla acted as a labour distribution point.

Investigating Bonegilla: Welcome to work in Australia.

<https://youtu.be/z2UOXYOy1AY>





## Inquiry 1 – The Bonegilla Experiment, 1948 - 1951

Arthur Calwell, the Minister for Immigration, told parliament and the public of his big, bold plan for bringing new non-British migrants to Australia, and to place them in a migrant reception centre:



*“To accommodate these displaced persons until they are settled in employment, a former military camp at Bonegilla, near Wodonga, has been fitted out as a reception and training centre. At this camp the migrants will be given a further course in instruction [adding to the shipboard lessons] in utilitarian English, Australian social conditions and other subjects which will assist their easy absorption into the community.... ”*

The decision to accommodate these migrants on arrival in a well-organised reception and training centre was an entirely new departure from previous immigration plans. It was the first experiment of its kind to be undertaken in Australia.

In late 1948, staff from the International Refugee Organisation in Geneva inspected Bonegilla and proclaimed the experiment successful. Members of the staff at Bonegilla, they said, were ‘capable’. The education, employment and entertainment arrangements were ‘more than satisfactory’. The food was of a ‘very high standard’. ‘Good quality clothing’ was available for those who needed it. ‘Everything which seems possible to [make] the reception of the new comers into [a] sincere welcome is being done.



Here, every individual is a recognized human being with human rights, and never was there an impression of collective or mass disregard for personal problems.' The term 'DP' (displaced person) had been replaced with 'New Australian'. 'The overall impression gained was one of complete confidence in the efforts being made by the Commonwealth of Australia for the best possible reception and absorption of their New Australians.' (IRO Report CP 815/1021.134, NAA).

Calwell told parliament he was well pleased with the IRO report: 'No other country was offering such training and facilities to ensure that their life in their new land began propitiously.' Major Alton Kershaw, the first centre director, used the report to claim that 'nowhere in the world was better care given to displaced persons than at Bonegilla'.

In 1951 the Australian immigration authorities also proclaimed their satisfaction with the experiment. They decided to continue to use Bonegilla for assisted migrants from non-British countries.

Vol. 15, No. 30 36 Pages January 3, 1948 108 Castlereagh Street, SYDNEY The Australian Women's Weekly 9 4d.

## Romance in air at Bonegilla migrants' camp

Baltic men and women are fine types, already love Australia

By MARY COLES, staff reporter

Romance is in the air at the Commonwealth Immigration Reception and Training Centre at Bonegilla, near Albury, New South Wales, where the first of 12,000 displaced persons to settle here are learning the Australian way of life.

When some of the girls were asked whether they would care to Anglicise or shorten their almost universally unpronounceable surnames, they shook their heads and grinned. "No! It wouldn't be worth while. We will probably change them soon."

**A**FTER falling under the spell of the lovely looks and fine, courageous personalities of these girls, all I can say is that Australian men will be very unenterprising if they don't seek those changes.

Dr. Ralph Crossley, who is in charge of the Centre, tells the story that one girl to whom he had remarked, encouragingly, "You'll soon settle into the Australian way of life," knowingly agreed, "Yes! Yes! Of course, I will find them."

But Australian men will find strong competition in the girls' own countrymen, who vastly outnumber the girls at the Centre.

Already there has been one marriage among Baltic men and




**END OF THE RAINBOW** for lovely 23-year-old Lithuanian typist Erica Eiken and 24-year-old Estonian Werner Baumann was reached when they were married at the Bonegilla Centre a week after their arrival.



SCENT of gum-

# Magazine stories about Bonegilla

## Australian Women's Weekly

The first pictorial magazine story introducing the Australian public to the Bonegilla Reception Centre and to the post-war immigration program was in 1948.

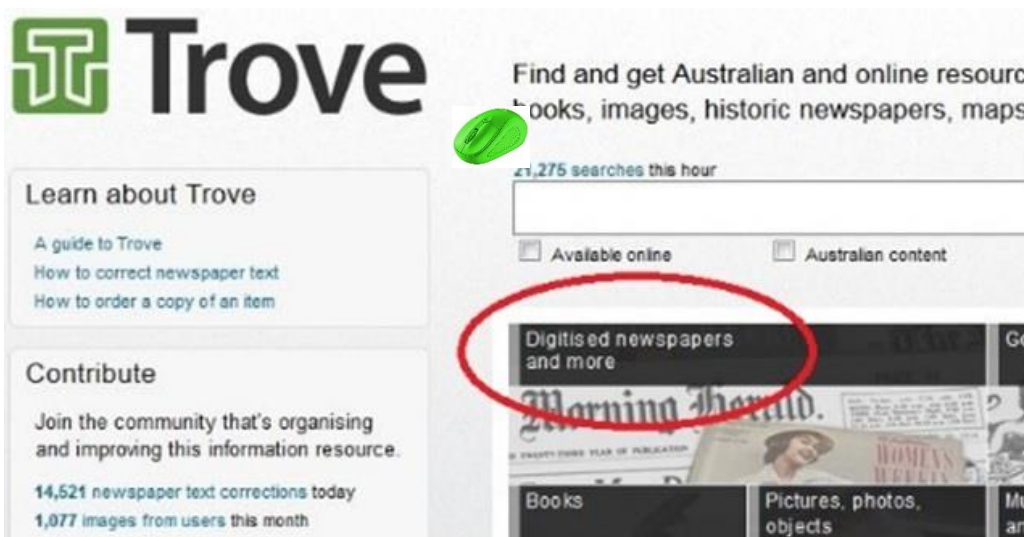
A report in the Australian Women's Weekly 3 January 1948 by Mary Coles was one of several media reports sponsored by the Department to celebrate the carefully stage managed arrival of the first of Calwell's 'Beautiful Balts' at Bonegilla. The writer anticipated women readers and focussed on the expectations of the new women arrivals, touching on some of their immediate challenges.



*Archive 1 - Open the link below to go to Trove at the National Library of Australia*

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/>

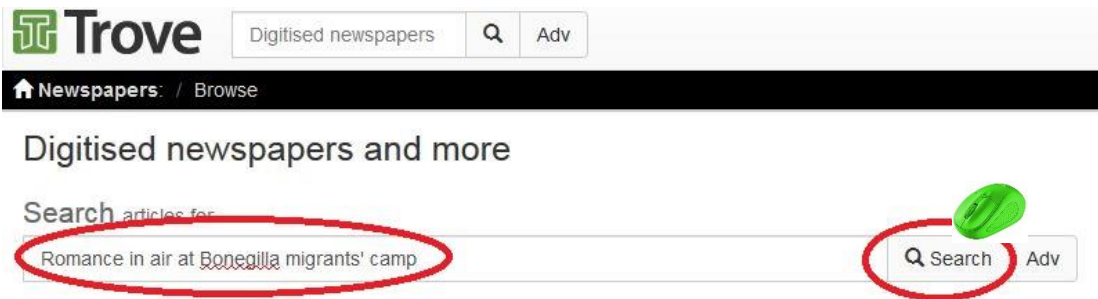
1) Find and open the link: "Digitised Newspapers and More"



2) Type into the Search:

Romance in air at Bonegilla migrants' camp

Now click 'Search'



3) Select:

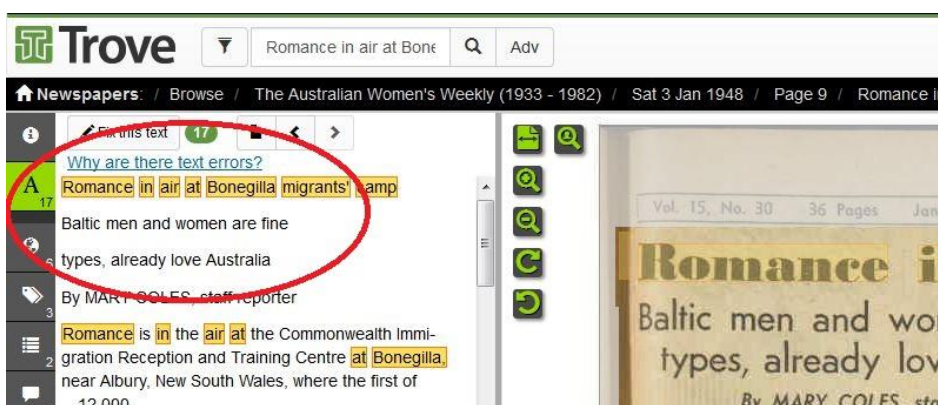
***Romance in air at Bonegilla migrants' camp Baltic men and women are fine types, already love Australia***

*The Australian Women's Weekly (1933 - 1982) Saturday 3 January 1948 p 9 Article Illustrated*



4) Read:

*Read this magazine story (you can read a plain text version in the left hand column).*





## ? Questions



The editor knew that readers often only read headlines, sub-headings and captions.

- 01 What was the overall impression the pictures and headlines gave about the experiences of the migrants?
- 02 How did the reporter assure readers that all was well at Bonegilla?
- 03 How did the reporter explain what the government wanted the reception centre to do?
- 04 In what ways was it 'Heaven to be Here', according to the story?
- 05 What kinds of problems did government anticipate new arrivals might need help with?

Cont...



## Questions Cont...

- 06 Are there any indications that some might have had more difficulties than others?
- 07 How did the reporter convey the idea that the new arrivals were good-humoured and likely to make a success of their migration?
- 08 From the story, what types of jobs would the women and the men get?
- 09 How might an historian assess the value of this evidence?

## Pix Magazine

Pix was a picture magazine aimed at a popular readership. It introduced its readers to Bonegilla on 31 January 1948.



*Archive 2 - Open the link below to go to Trove at the National Library of Australia*

Use the following link to view *Pix* Magazine from 31 January 1948:

<https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-462995690/view?partId=nla.obj-463174505#page/n1/mode/1up>



Scroll down and read the story  
“Migrants learn to be Australians”  
on pages 3 to 5.

### ? Questions

- 10 Why would the reporter say ‘Migrants live for the future and want to forget the past’?
- 11 How did the reporter try to get readers to think positively about Bonegilla and the migrants living there?



## Inquiry 2 – Receiving Assisted Migrants and Refugees from Europe in the 1950s and 1960s

1950s



It made good economic sense to continue with a vigorous immigration program after the displaced persons scheme ended after World War II. More people were sought through the 1950s from both the United Kingdom and Europe. An energetic 'Bring out a Briton' campaign was launched in 1957. Australia became a founding member of the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM), 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 in the early 1950s with the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Italy and Greece. By 1961, it had similar agreements with Malta, Spain, Belgium, and some Nordic countries. In 1956, the Department of Immigration celebrated the arrival of the one millionth migrant. By 1959, the nation had reached a population of 10 million, of which 17 per cent had been born overseas. The number of migrants received from the United Kingdom roughly equalled the number from non-British Europe.

To cater for what seemed the different needs of assisted migrants, the Bonegilla Reception Centre was altered progressively through the 1950s and 1960s. Facilities and services were improved. Official photographers visited almost annually to show that the former army camp was being transformed into a comfortable reception centre ‘with all the amenities of a country town’. The publicists hoped that the provision of comfortable short-term family accommodation on arrival might help make Australia attractive to the skilled workers from overseas that the nation needed.



## 1960s



*Picturing and Re-picturing Bonegilla* 53

By the 1960s Australia was finding it more difficult to recruit from Europe, where economic conditions were improving. Fewer people were emigrating from several countries, such as the Netherlands. Further, and perhaps even more worrying, departure rates were alarmingly high, especially among the British, Germans and Dutch. Approximately one in five of those who had migrated to Australia returned permanently to their home country.

Immigration authorities were increasingly worried that the conditions at the reception centre might be deterring would-be migrants and might partly explain why so many new arrivals chose not to stay in Australia.

The numbers arriving at Bonegilla slowed and Bonegilla became more diverse. From 1959 and through the 1960s, the most numerous new arrivals were Greeks, Germans and Yugoslavs (especially Croatians). Recruiting officers cast a wider net, taking in migrants from a greater diversity of countries, among them Ireland, Sweden, Finland, France, South Africa, Turkey, Syria and Armenia.

The local newspaper, The Border Morning Mail, depicted families from Norway 'in search of steady employment and above all, sunshine'. It reported that refugees fleeing Soviet repression in Czechoslovakia were 'beautiful' and 'young intellectuals'. They found Bonegilla a 'Botanic Garden'. Fleeing communism, they were favourably impressed with Australia: it was 'beautiful that people can own a home of their own with a yard about it'.

But not all groups were depicted so generously. White Russian refugees fleeing Communist China reminded immigration officers of the early Displaced Person (DP) arrivals after World War II: they were 'generally rural in appearance, English weak, a little bewildered and forlorn, here and there a brown almond eye hinted at traces of the oriental'. The White Russians were put into quarantine when there was an outbreak of typhoid among them in 1962.

There were also changes to the White Australia policy, with the Immigration Minister exercising his discretion to accept non-Europeans according to their 'general suitability' and ability to be integrated. In May 1966, provision was made for families of mixed race to be sent to Bonegilla, rather than directly to other worker hostels.

Through the 1960s Bonegilla changed. Many migrants now arrived by plane rather than ship and Bonegilla took on a new look. It was officially relabelled 'Reception Centre', thus losing the former 'Training Centre' tag that might have deterred the skilled migrants. The blocks were renamed with alphabetical labels rather than Army numbers and decorated with distinctive Australian wildlife emblems. There were other visible signs that 'assimilation' was softening into 'integration'.

## Good Neighbour

A publicity story in a government sponsored magazine showed prospective migrants and the Australian public how Bonegilla operated in the 1960s.



Archive 3 - Trove at the National Library of Australia



### **'There's a New Look at Bonegilla', 1965**

The *Good Neighbour*, a newsletter published by the Department of Immigration, made much of the improvements at the centre in 1965.

Use the following link to view the *Good Neighbour* 1 May 1965:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/result?q=%22There%27s+a+new+Look+at+Bonegilla%22&exactPhrase=&anyWords=&notWords=&requestHandler=&dateFrom=&dateTo=&sortBy=>



### Questions

12

How did the publicists promote the idea that Bonegilla was 'no longer a stark army camp'?

13

How were the arrangements for the newly arrived in the 1960s different from those in the 1940s?



## Key Inquiry Questions

Now return to the Key Inquiry Questions on page 4 and record your responses to these historical inquiry questions.

