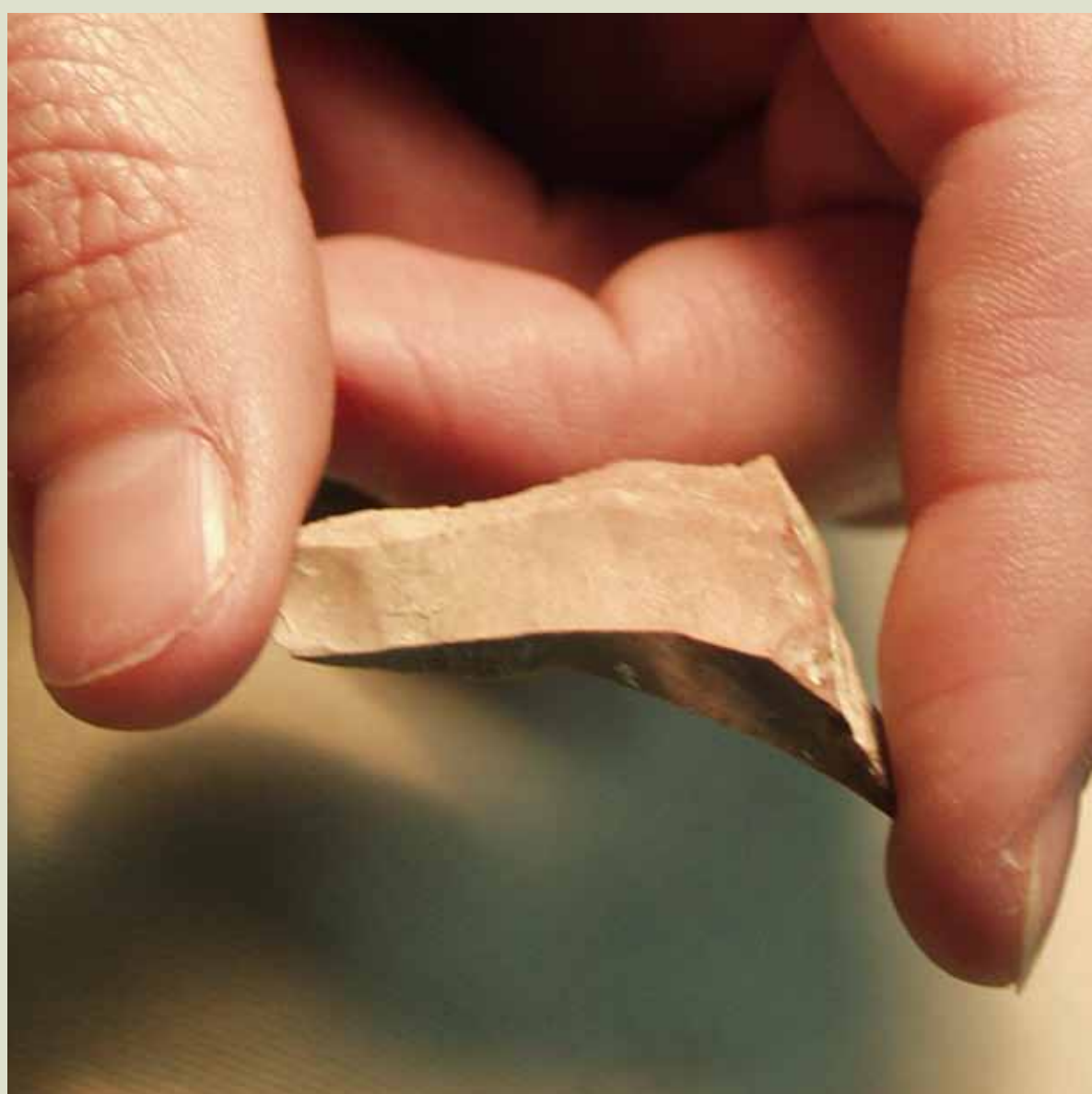


# Before Churchill

A key to understanding the history of the area before Churchill was built in 1965, is the Morwell River and its creeks. For the Aboriginal people who lived here, the creeks and rivers were an important source for fish, eels and mussels. Plants grew in the nearby swamps and morasses. The men hunted kangaroos and wallabies on the plains and used the hills and ridges as lookouts. The ridges were a good place for keeping an eye on campfires and other clans' movements, and also for making stone tools, using stone from quarries in the Haunted Hills.



Silcrete found during a recent archaeological dig on the Morwell River flats. Archaeologists think it was mined by the Ganai/Kurnai people in a quarry in the Haunted Hills. (Courtesy David Arnault)

The first Europeans who came to the area in the 1840s were looking for land to graze sheep and cattle, and the well-watered flood plains along the Morwell River were a great drawcard. The new settlers were called squatters, and they were able to lease thousands of hectares of land. On the land stretching between Billy's Creek and the Latrobe River there were only two squatting runs: Hazelwood and Maryville. The squatters built houses along the Morwell River and fenced paddocks for their stock.

But the squatters couldn't keep control over so much land for long. In the 1870s, the runs were subdivided into smaller allotments and hopeful farmers came to the district, now known as Hazelwood, to 'select' land and develop farms. They came to the Morwell River flats and also fanned out towards the hills. The selectors had to clear the bush and forest. They built slab and bark huts in the clearings. Schools were opened. Selections developed into farms and tracks became roads.

At the same time that the selectors began clearing their land, prospectors and geologists discovered the brown coal deposits in the Latrobe River valley.



The Eel Hole Creek School - Pupils with their teacher, William Loftus, photographed at the Eel Hole Creek School soon after it opened in 1900. Included in the the photograph are children from the Silcock, Howard, James and Dietrich families. The school's name was changed to Hazelwood South in 1904. (Courtesy Morwell Historical Society)



Hare's House - This farm house was built by the Hare family in the 1920s on land originally selected by Thomas O'Halloran in the 1870s. The Hares developed a productive dairy farm along Eel Hole Creek and also grew oats, millet and potatoes. The farm was later sold to the Dobbin family. (Courtesy Pat Dobbin)





# Why Churchill?

In the 1920s, the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SEC) built an open cut mine and power station at Yallourn along the banks of the Latrobe River. Hazelwood farmers could sometimes hear the sound of the works whistle wafting over the flats. But after the Second World War, when the demand for power surged, coal mining and power generation came much closer to the district. The SEC began building an open cut mine and briquette factories to the south of Morwell and then announced plans to build a mammoth new power station, to be known as the Hazelwood power station.

The Latrobe Valley was booming. In 1961, the SEC anticipated that 60,000 new residents would come to the area over the next forty years. Where would they live?

Building a new town was the solution. Ambitious plans were developed for a town of 40,000. The plans featured a major bus terminal, shopping mall, offices, and a multi-storey department store with a roof heliport.



From farm house to works office. This house was built by Cyril Hare in 1950, close to where the Switchback Road roundabout is today. It became the Housing Commission's first works office. (Painting by Violet Biram, courtesy Lydia Allan)

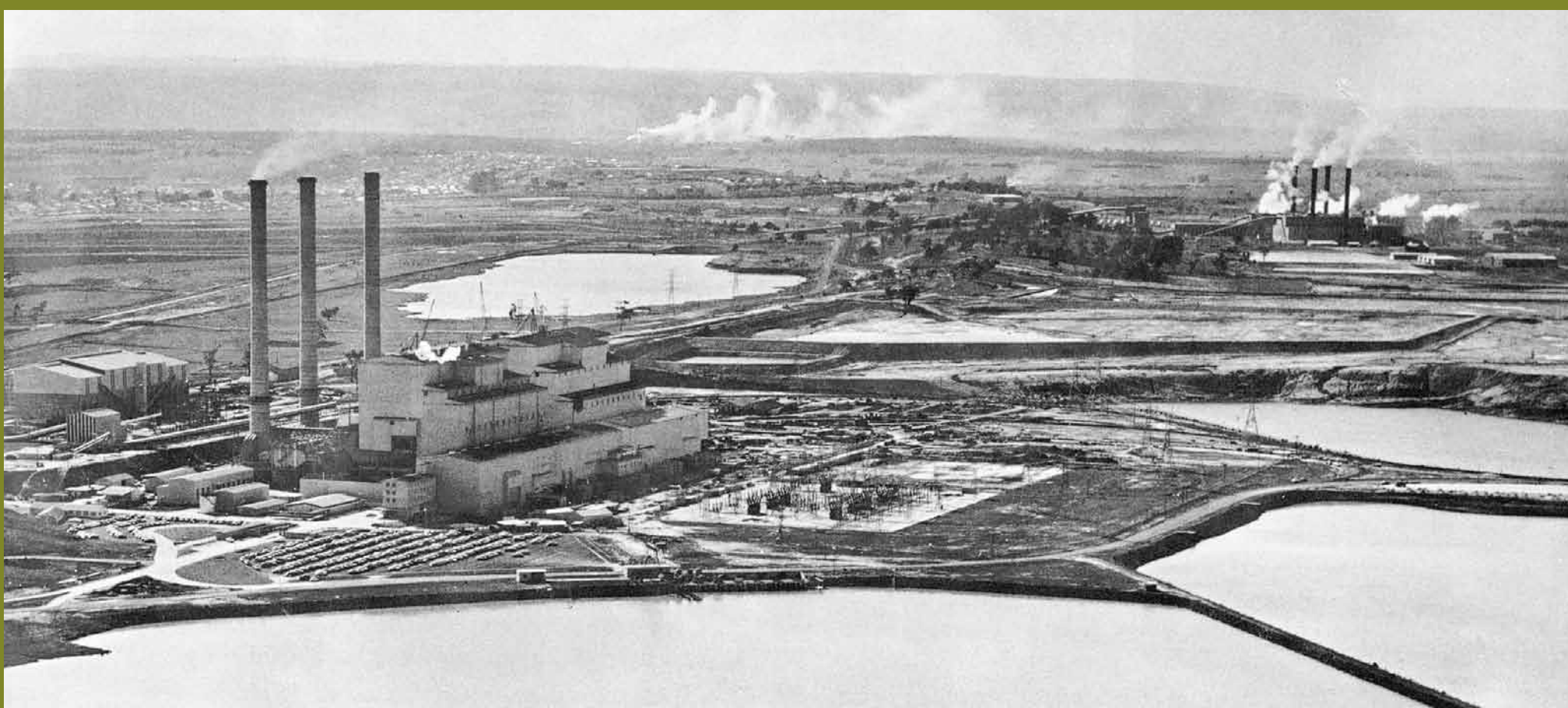
The Housing Commission was in charge of developing the model town and had chosen Hazelwood as the best site where 3,000 hectares of farmland were compulsorily acquired. Overlooking the Latrobe Valley and above the pollution, the new town would have a dramatic backdrop of hills and expansive views.

Pipes had been laid and road building was underway when **Morwell Advertiser** readers were jolted by a shock announcement in January 1965. The new town of Hazelwood would be renamed Churchill in honour of the British wartime prime minister, Sir Winston Churchill, who had recently died.

This was a controversial decision.



The Yallourn A power station - Electricity generation came to the banks of the Latrobe River in the 1920s. The SEC used the vast brown coal reserves to provide Victoria with a statewide electricity supply. (Courtesy Centre for Gippsland Studies)



A work in progress - The Hazelwood power station and pondage in 1965. Three of the eight generators had been built when construction started at Churchill. Smoke from the Yallourn power station is in the distance and the Morwell briquette factory and power station can also be seen. (Courtesy State Electricity Commission of Victoria)



Children at Hazelwood South School during its last days as a rural school. In 1966, the enrolment jumped from 27 to 218 as families moved into Churchill. Portables were hastily set up around the school building. (Courtesy Florence Blucher)





# Pioneering Churchill

We've never looked back, Churchill pioneers say as they talk about moving here in the 1960s. Coming to Churchill was a great opportunity. We could buy a new brick house with a deposit of \$200.

In 1965 and 1966, a network of crescents and courts soon appeared. The Ayres family moved into the first house on the corner of Howard Avenue and Switchback Road. With elevated sites, many of the houses had spectacular views over the pondage to the Baw Baws.

By early 1967, the town had a population of 800. Most of the new residents came from the Latrobe Valley and worked for the SEC. They were young and had young families. Each household was welcomed by Reverend Peter Arch of the Co-operating Churches, or a member of the welcoming committee. Early issues of the **Churchill News** were delivered with the milk by John Koedijk. The newsletter was typed and duplicated by Peter Arch, and a vital way of keeping the new residents informed of organisations, social events, bus times, progress of the shopping centre, working bees, school news, building developments and campaigns to improve Churchill's services.

Churchill was a town of children. The streets were full of them during the school holidays. They explored the swamps and bush below Manning Drive, played on construction sites, tadpoled in the creeks and made a beeline for Lake Hyland and the mysterious ruins of Hare house. Guy Fawkes Night was a highlight. The children built communal bonfires around the town and prepared for an explosive night of rockets, Catherine wheels and double bangers. In summer they went swimming in Hazelwood pondage.

As they worked on their gardens turning clay into lawns and building backyard barbeques, residents were also busy securing facilities for the town and their children. An early achievement was the opening of the Watson Park kindergarten in 1968.



Birthday party in Churchill, 1968 - Melinda Brown, in a pink floral dress, is enjoying the food at her fourth birthday party. Among the guests are Andrew Arch and Alison Rae-Jones. (Courtesy Wendy Brown)



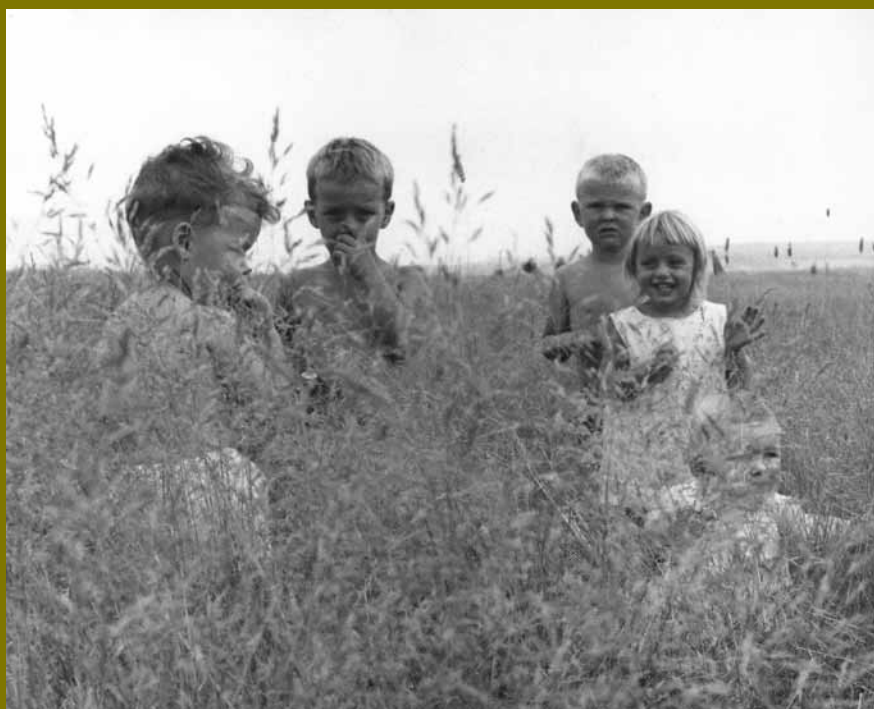
Opening of the shopping centre, 1967. The official opening of the shopping centre attracted a crowd. The upstairs section was used for a variety of functions including early meetings of the Churchill Citizens' Association and temporary quarters for a textile manufacturer. The chemist shop in the centre of the photograph was operated by Ross and Liz Olquist, who were pharmacists in Churchill for over thirty years. (Courtesy Churchill and District News)



Streetscapes forming - Looking down Switchback Road with Hazelwood Pondage in the distance. (Courtesy Churchill and District News)



Shopping bus to Morwell. Before the shops were built in Churchill, a bus was provided to take people into Morwell. Shoppers had to be fast and well organised as the bus left at 9.30 and returned at 11.30. (Courtesy Don and Anne Stewart)



Children in 1967 playing on the site set aside for the Churchill Primary School. The school opened the following year. (Courtesy Jean Watts)





# Churchill Comes of Age

In 1990, Churchill celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary and built a commemorative wall. Bricks were inscribed with the names of the first families to live in the town, and the names of the farming families on whose land the town had been built. Celebrating its history, Churchill had come of age, but it had not been plain sailing all the way.

It soon became obvious that the new town would not have a population of 40,000. The Latrobe Valley's population did not increase in the way the SEC had predicted so plans for suburbs, roads and heliports were soon scaled back. In particular, housing construction slowed. Between 1965 and 1969, 526 houses had been built. Over the next five years, only about 50 houses were completed.



Churchill Football Club premiership team, 1983.  
"The Roos proved too strong for the Bloods" (Courtesy Mark Answerth)

It had also taken some time for people to break their ties with the nearby Latrobe Valley towns where they had lived and their extended families still lived. In the *Churchill News*, Peter Arch kept challenging residents to make new connections: 'Are we still going back to our own haunts?' Looking back, people agree that it was getting facilities, particularly sporting facilities for their children, which 'tied the town together'.

But by 1990, with a population of over 5,000, Churchill could show it had come of age and forged an identity. The town had three primary schools and a secondary school. Through vigorous lobbying, residents had secured a community health centre. Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education brought tertiary education to the town and Churchill had proved itself in the sporting arena. The town had rallied behind the premiership winning Churchill Football Club.

As residents drove back to Churchill and saw the line of hills that framed the town, they knew they were coming home.



Pioneer Wall 1990 - Building the pioneer wall are bricklayer Ken Garlick, who had worked on the early houses in Churchill, and assistant Tom Lawless. The wall consists of 400 bricks commemorating first residents and farming families. (Courtesy Churchill and District Community Association)



Churchill Post Primary School under construction, c.1985. The first students were housed at Maryvale until the school was finished. Officially opened in 1986, the school later became a campus of Kurnai College. (Courtesy Kurnai College)



Just completed in 1977 is the Churchill Co-operating Church, a union of five denominations. Services had been held in Roy Court and McDonald Way, but now the community had a church. (Courtesy Co-operating Churches in Churchill)





# Churchill Forty Years On

If you stand at the roundabout at Monash Way and Switchback Road, much of Churchill is revealed. You can't miss the complex rooflines of Monash University with its domes, pyramids and hexagons. Beginning as a college of advanced education, it is now a campus of Monash University, dedicated to teaching and research. The university has attracted a diverse population to the town.

Continue along Monash Way and inspect the shopping centre. You can also catch a full frontal view of the town symbol, known locally as the Cigar. The shopping centre was extended when a new complex, Hazelwood Village, opened in the 1990s. Not far from the centre is Hazelwood House, a hostel for the aged. In the 1960s, Churchill had few residents over 40. Now it caters for all ages.

Stand at a high point overlooking the town. A feature of Churchill – and a legacy from its first incarnation as a larger town – is the extensive parkland and open space: playgrounds, sporting complexes, lake, golf course and walking trails.

In the many courts and crescents of Churchill, the houses still overlook icons that were part of the SEC's empire: the Hazelwood power station and pondage. But the SEC, which was the instigator of Churchill and dominated the Latrobe Valley, no longer exists. The town weathered its privatisation, with many people retraining.

The young parents of the 1960s are now doting grandparents. Their neighbours may be friends who have lived next door for thirty years, or international students studying at Monash, or people who have moved into Churchill to retire. New estates extend the town into the bush.



New facilities at Glendonald Park, 2005. Hours of hard work by local residents, along with construction and funding from Latrobe City Council and the Department of Human Services' Neighbourhood Renewal Project, have resulted in new amenities at Glendonald Park. (Courtesy Margaret Guthrie)



Residents at Hazelwood House, 2005. One million dollars was raised for the hostel as a result of dedicated community support. (Courtesy Beth Price)



Who will forget the snowfalls at Churchill in 2005? (Courtesy Churchill Primary School)



Lumen Christi Primary School's Eco Building, 2005. Lumen Christi's new multi-purpose building uses solar heating, innovative insulation and heat transfer technologies, underground water storage and landscaping to create a trail blazing environmentally sustainable building. (Courtesy Dan Clancy)



Tree pruning at Mathison Park, 2004. Mathison Park's 37 hectares include Lake Hyland, a walking track along Eel Hole Creek, an arboretum and ruins from the Hare farm. In this photograph, the old orchard at Hare's house is receiving some attention after a tree pruning demonstration. (Courtesy Terry Key)





# Landmarks in Churchill



Site of the Eel Hole Creek School and first Hazelwood South School

Close to the Churchill Hotel are two venerable pines remaining from the site of the Eel Hole Creek School. Built on land belonging to Thomas Northway, the school opened in 1900. It didn't remain 'Eel Hole Creek' for long and was renamed Hazelwood South. In 1925, pupils moved into a larger building on a new site where the Glendonald Estate is now. Hazelwood South closed in 1968, after the Churchill Primary School opened.

The pines mark the beginning of education in the district.



Hare's House, Mathison Park

For joggers, cyclists, and dog walkers, the ruins of Hare's House are a landmark along the Eel Hole Creek walk and a tangible reminder of Churchill's farming history. There is plenty to explore at this site: wells built by the O'Halloran family who first selected the land in 1876, remains of the milking shed, orchard and garden developed by the Hares who built the house in the 1920s and the Dobbin family who took over the farm in the 1950s. The Housing Commission compulsorily acquired the land in 1963.



The First House in Churchill

The first house to be built in Churchill was completed in October 1965, on the corner of Switchback Road and Howard Avenue. As it grew dark on the last Saturday in October, Churchill could boast a population of seven. The first family had moved in: Graham Ayres (who was construction foreman), Gwen Ayres and their five children. Soon other houses were completed in McInnes Crescent and more Churchill 'pioneers' moved in around the corner.



The Binishell

The binishell mushroomed into shape on a hot day in December 1979. A large crowd had assembled nearby to watch as hundreds of tons of concrete were inflated into a dome. Built as a hall for the Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education, and the place where graduation ceremonies were held, the binishell has also been the venue for many town events and school concerts.

The binishell's days are numbered. A landmark in Churchill because of its distinctive shape and multiple uses, it has inherent structural problems. The University plans to replace it with a new building.



The Cigar

Town Spire, Cigar or Starlings' Nest? Love it or hate it, the Cigar is a feature of Churchill. Built by the Housing Commission as a symbol to inspire the residents of the new town, it was soon known as the Cigar, referring to a prop that Winston Churchill was rarely without. The structure was unveiled in 1967 and had not been cheap to build. Residents would have preferred a swimming pool.

