ND 2369

BLACKBURN
Journey to the east



Blackburn was founded as a model community and remains an attractive place to live. By ELI GREENBLAT

For a suburb that was the brainchild of an ambitious 19th century corporation, Blackburn has developed into one of Melbourne's nicest residential areas, with its leafy tree-lined streets and large, inviting parks.

Residents have worked hard to create a place where people have access to all the modern conveniences, without being divorced from the natural environment.

It is something they are proud of, and a brief stroll through the streets reveals well-kept homes with ornate and lush gardens, giving the illusion that Blackburn is a country town in rural England rather than a huge suburb on the outskirts of busy metropolitan Melbourne.

Nestled between Nunawading, Doncaster and Burwood, Blackburn is a patch of green in Melbourne's sprawling eastern suburbs.

The suburb had its start in the boardroom (see History, below), planned by the Blackburn & Tunstall Property Company, with the first houses built around what is today Blackburn and Whitehorse roads.

Originally dominated by houses on expansive plots of land, the collapse of the land boom at the turn of the century forced town planners to carve the blocks into smaller parcels of land to sell to new home buyers.

The return of soldiers after World War II saw another round of splits, with residential blocks quickly subdivided and sold.

Today Blackburn is experiencing another burst of interest from prospective buyers, with the area's greenbelt setting and pleasant lifestyle enticing new settlers.

History

The enterprising Blackburn & Tunstall Property Company chose the area that is today Blackburn as the site of a new Melbourne suburb in the 1850s, and began to buy large tracts of land around a creek that flowed from Whitehorse Road to Canterbury Road.

The creek was named after James Blackburn (1803-1854), a city surveyor and founder of Melbourne's water supply, and it soon became the young suburb.

By 1865 the Blackburn Hotel was opened, and a post office soon followed in 1876. A railway station in 1882 connected the area to the rest of Melbourne.

The great Australian artist Frederick McCubbin called Blackburn home for a number of years and was inspired by the area's bush setting, using it for the backdrop to one of his most famous works *A bush burial*.

City of Whitehorse

In 1945 the former shire of Blackburn, along with Mitcham, was proclaimed the City of Nunawading. By 1994 Blackburn had become one of several suburbs amalgamated into the new City of Whitehorse.

The city takes its name from the statue of a white horse that once adorned the front entrance of the area's first hotel.

The City of Whitehorse is less than 15 kilometres from Melbourne, or 20 minutes along the Eastern Freeway, and is one of Melbourne's biggest municipalities, covering an area of 64.3 square kilometres.

Best known for its wide open spaces and lush parks, the City of Whitehorse has more than 350 parks and reserves within its boundaries, with the Blackburn Lake Sanctuary arguably its most beautiful and popular attraction.



Map: JAMIE BROWN

Blackburn Lake Sanctuary

The founders of Blackburn had originally hoped the suburb would become the "Toorak of the east", and the lake was to be a crucial incentive in attracting well-to-do Melburnians to the area.

The lake was formed in the late 19th century by the damning of Gardiner's Creek stream, paid for by the Freehold Investment & Banking Company of Australia.

Initially the plan worked. Hundreds of city dwellers began to venture out to the lake, attracted by the opportunity to sail and engage in other water sports.

It soon became a popular jaunt for people to go on picnic excursions to Blackburn, with eager tourists transported on converted cattle trucks on the railways.

Although Blackburn's upwardly mobile aspirations evaporated with the end of the land boom in the 1900s, the lake never lost its appeal and is still today a popular attraction.

The sanctuary preserves a semblance of the bushland and wildlife habitat of the area, and numerous walking tracks provide scenic recreational opportunities.

Shopping

Blackburn residents have been able to stop their town being invaded by the large shopping centres and complexes that now dominate many other Melbourne suburbs.

This is good news for the traditional family-run shops found along the main strips on Railway Road, Blackburn Road and South Parade in central Blackburn.

Most needs can be met here, and customers can be seen chatting to staff and exchanging the usual community-related gossip. It is something that underlines Blackburn's village atmosphere.

Residents have been less successful in stopping the proliferation of cafes all over the suburb, and corner shops also offer a wide selection of coffees, bread, jams and delicatessen items.

But don't panic, people who love nothing better than spending the day strolling through modern shopping centres will find large complexes in the surrounding suburbs of Forest Hill, Doncaster and Nunawading.





Education

Blackburn has an extensive network of pre-school, kindergarten, primary and independent secondary schools that will suit most family requirements. A bonus for families in the suburb is that they can also tap into the City of Whitehorse's schools, giving parents a huge number of options, from pre-schools run by religious orders such as the Baptists, to private and public institutions.

Independent Catholic primary schools include St Luke The Evangelist in Blackburn South and St Phillips Primary School in Blackburn North.

The Blackburn Primary School on Whitehorse Road is the local state school and offers a quality music and arts program.

Although Blackburn lacks in a rich mix of private secondary schools, the surrounding suburbs have schools that cater for all needs. The local state secondary school, Blackburn High School, is on Springfield Road, Blackburn.

Blackburn is a great base for tertiary students, with Monash University (Clayton) and Deakin Rusden only a 15-minute drive down Blackburn Road. The suburb is also close to Box Hill Institute of TAFE, Deakin University (Burwood) and Eastern TAFE (Wantirna).

Prices

Median prices for houses and units

Blackburn houses	
1997 - $175,000	
1998 - $190,000	
1999 - $233,000	
Blackburn South	
1997 - $153,000	
1998 - $165,250	
1999 - $200,000	
Blackburn North	
1997 - $155,000	
1998 - $156,000	
1999 - $195,000	
Blackburn units*	
1997 - $148,000	
1998 - $146,000	
1999 - $170,000	

Source: Real Estate Institute of Victoria
** These median prices include all Blackburn, central, south and north.*

