

COMMERCIAL
CENTRE

4. CABRAMATTA COMMERCIAL CENTRE.

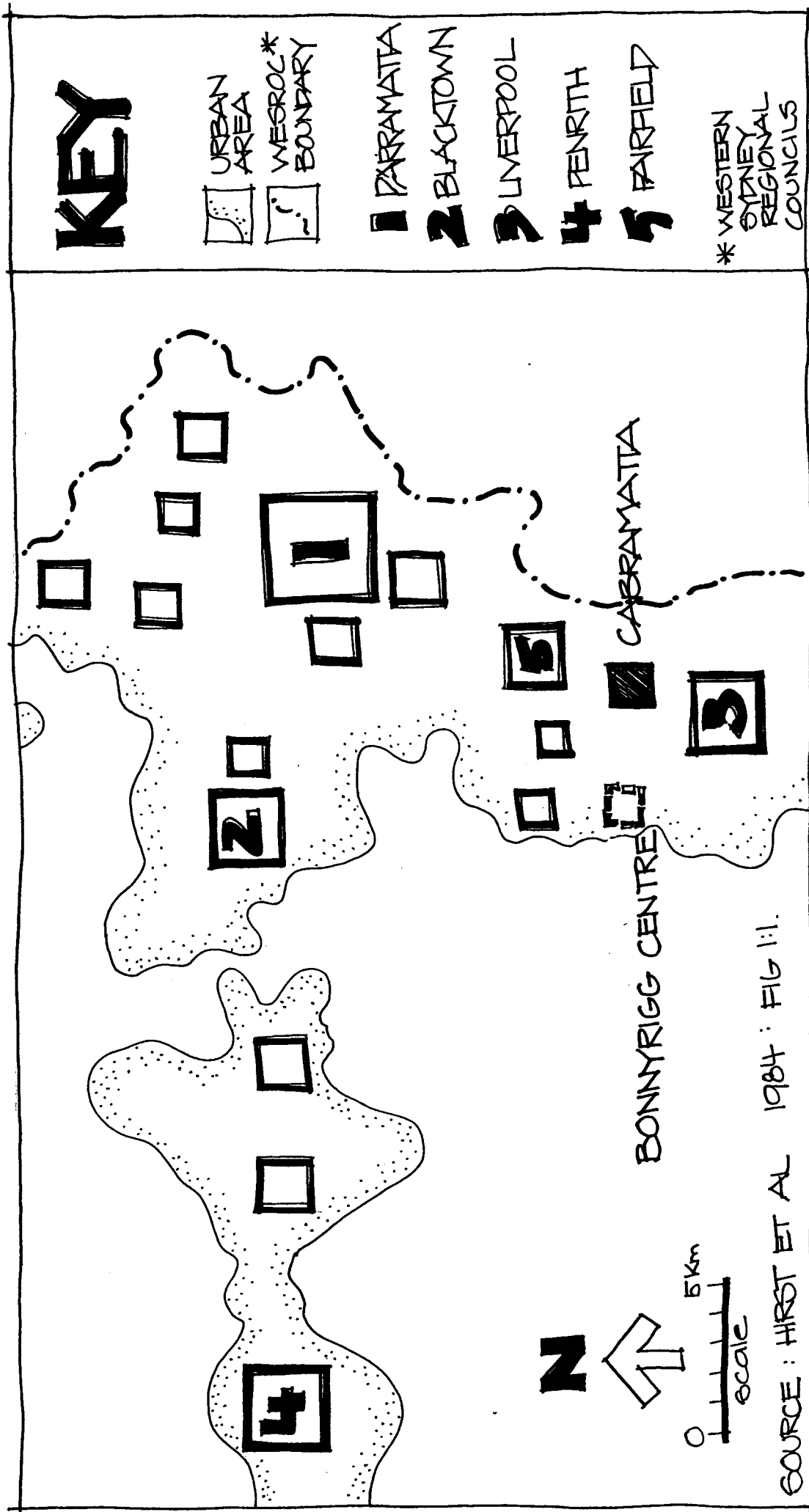
Cabramatta has been the focus of Indo-Chinese settlement in Sydney. The revitalisation of the commercial area can be directly linked to the settlement of these people in the Cabramatta area. The centre, which is located between the larger centres of Liverpool and Fairfield, was predicted to decline. It has instead become a central place for the Indo-Chinese community in Sydney and a thriving commercial centre due to their activities.

4.1 Regional Context

Cabramatta is a neighbourhood centre, its size in relation to other centres in the western Sydney region would indicate that it is just another suburban shopping centre like any other on the urban fringe.

A 1984 study of commercial centres carried out for the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (WESROC) ranked Cabramatta 12th in size of the 22 major centres in the Western region. (Hirst et al 1984:129) The location and relative size of centres surrounding Cabramatta as indicated in Figure 4:1 clearly indicates its position between the much larger centres of Liverpool and Fairfield. The tendency for larger centres to consolidate services at the expense of smaller centres would seem to indicate that Cabramatta should be a centre of ever diminishing significance in the hierarchy of centres in western Sydney.

This was the forecast made for the Centre in 1976 (Urban Systems 1978:53) but it has, instead, grown steadily and indeed the size and status of the Centre appear to have been among the factors that have enabled it to change in character and size. The development of a centre with an identifiably ethnic character would have been much more difficult in a larger centre.



**FIG 4:1
RELATIVE SIZE & LOCATION
WESROC COMMERCIAL CENTRES**

4.1.1 Changes in Regional Retail Structure.

The position of Cabramatta in the regional hierarchy will be influenced by the opening of a new sub-regional centre at Bonnyrigg the location of which, relative to Cabramatta, is indicated in Figure 4:2. This Centre, which is scheduled for completion in 1986, is designed to service the needs of the residents of the newly developing residential areas surrounding it and will contain some 16000m² of floorspace including a discount department store, supermarket, speciality shops and community facilities.

According to welfare workers in the Fairfield LGA many Indo-Chinese are moving to the new residential areas around Bonnyrigg because the private housing is relatively cheap and some Indo-Chinese families have been accommodated in the large Housing Commission estate at Bonnyrigg. The increasing importance of these suburbs to the west to the Indo-Chinese community is indicated by plans for the development of religious and community centres in Bonnyrigg by both the Vietnamese and Kampuchean communities. The extent of the impact of the Bonnyrigg centre on Cabramatta will depend on the ability of the new centre to attract the Indo-Chinese, to erode Cabramatta's role as their "central place"

Development of a centre at Bonnyrigg will provide additional opportunities for Indo-Chinese businessmen to locate a business close to their target population, providing that its management allows for after hours and Sunday trading. The design of the centre, however, gives only a few shops frontage to the outside which will make it difficult for Indo-Chinese businesses to develop a separate precinct in the manner that is evident in the Cabramatta Plaza. It is possible that it will develop as a second Indo-Chinese centre in Fairfield.

4.1.2 Trade Area

Cabramatta's trade area, as defined by in-Centre interviews carried out by Fairfield City Council (FCC) in August 1983, appears to have changed little since 1976 when a similar exercise was conducted by Urban Systems Corporation for FCC. The population living within the Trade Area has not altered significantly either and, based on the 1981 Census, is estimated at 58,000. (FCC 1984:8, Urban Systems Corp 1976:53)

The area from which Cabramatta derives its shoppers is limited by: the proximity of the centre to Liverpool and Fairfield, which are larger centres offering a greater range of services; Cabramatta and Orphan School Creeks; and the railway lines, as indicated in Figure 4:2. The 1983 shoppers survey mentioned above also found that the average shopper lived 1.19km from the Centre and 85.4% lived within 3.5 km. indicating that the majority of people who use the centre live in the immediate residential areas.

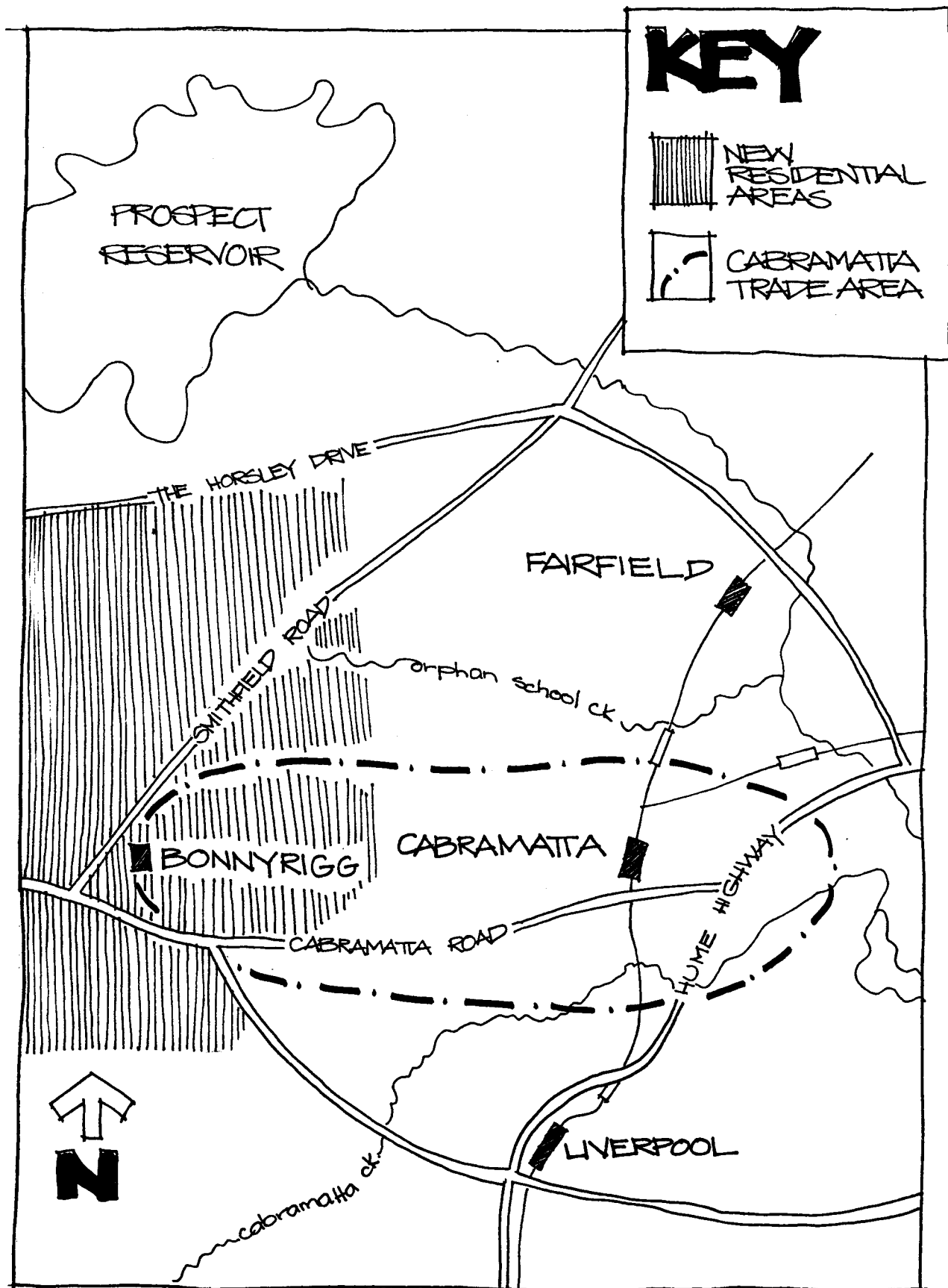


FIG 4-2
TRADE AREA
CABRAMATTA

Cabramatta has not extended its catchment to any significant extent into the new residential areas to the west and the extent of this penetration is likely to be further reduced once the Bonnyrigg centre is opened. Cabramatta is, however, also developing a secondary catchment. The 1983 interviews conducted by FCC indicated that on a normal weekday only 5.6% of visitors came from outside Fairfield LGA but a similar survey, conducted on the weekend, revealed that 27.7% of visitors were from outside Fairfield. Figure 4:3 shows the origins of respondents to this survey clearly illustrating the extent of this developing Trade Area which includes shoppers from much of the metropolitan area. (FCC 1984:8)

Cabramatta appears to be acting as a focus for the Indo-Chinese community in Sydney. On the weekends people from all over the metropolitan area come to shop and eat and meet friends. Even the most casual observer of the Centre would notice that on weekends, and particularly on Sundays, there are very few European faces to be seen in the still busy centre.

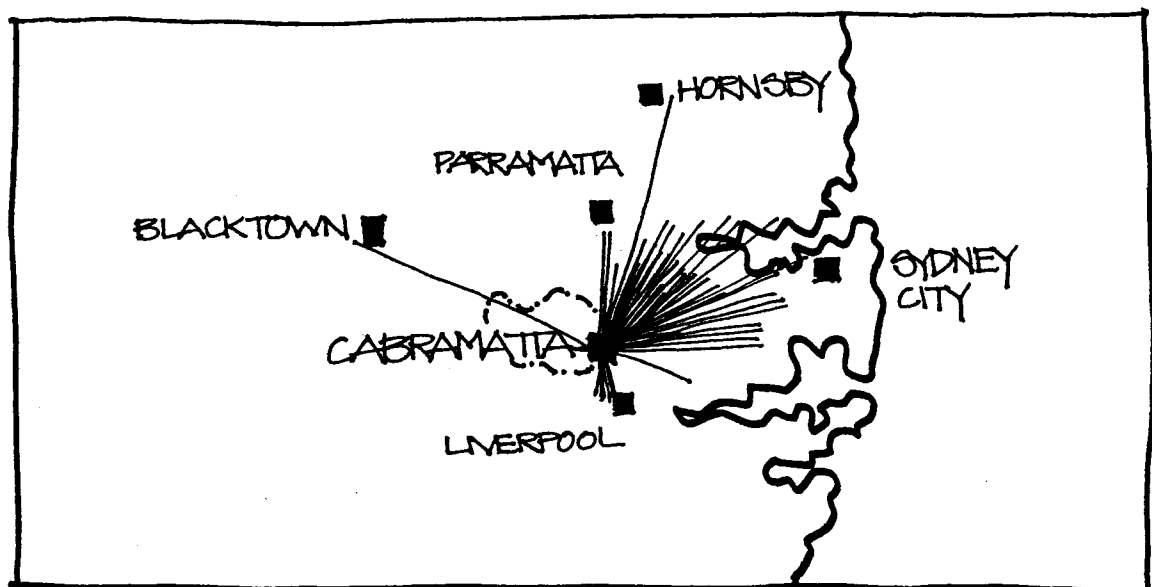


FIG 2:3
REGIONAL TRADE AREA
CABRAMATTA

SOURCE: F.C.C. 1984A : 8

4.2 Existing Situation

4.2.1 Introduction

Cabramatta is a traditional main street centre that developed around Cabramatta railway station. It grew to the west along John St. reflecting the origin of the majority of its customers to the west of the railway line. Recent developments have shifted the centre of activity away from John St towards Hughes St. to the north.

The centre has an effective circulation system: major parking areas link into John St; and through traffic using Cabramatta Rd. to by-pass the centre.

4.2.2 Structure

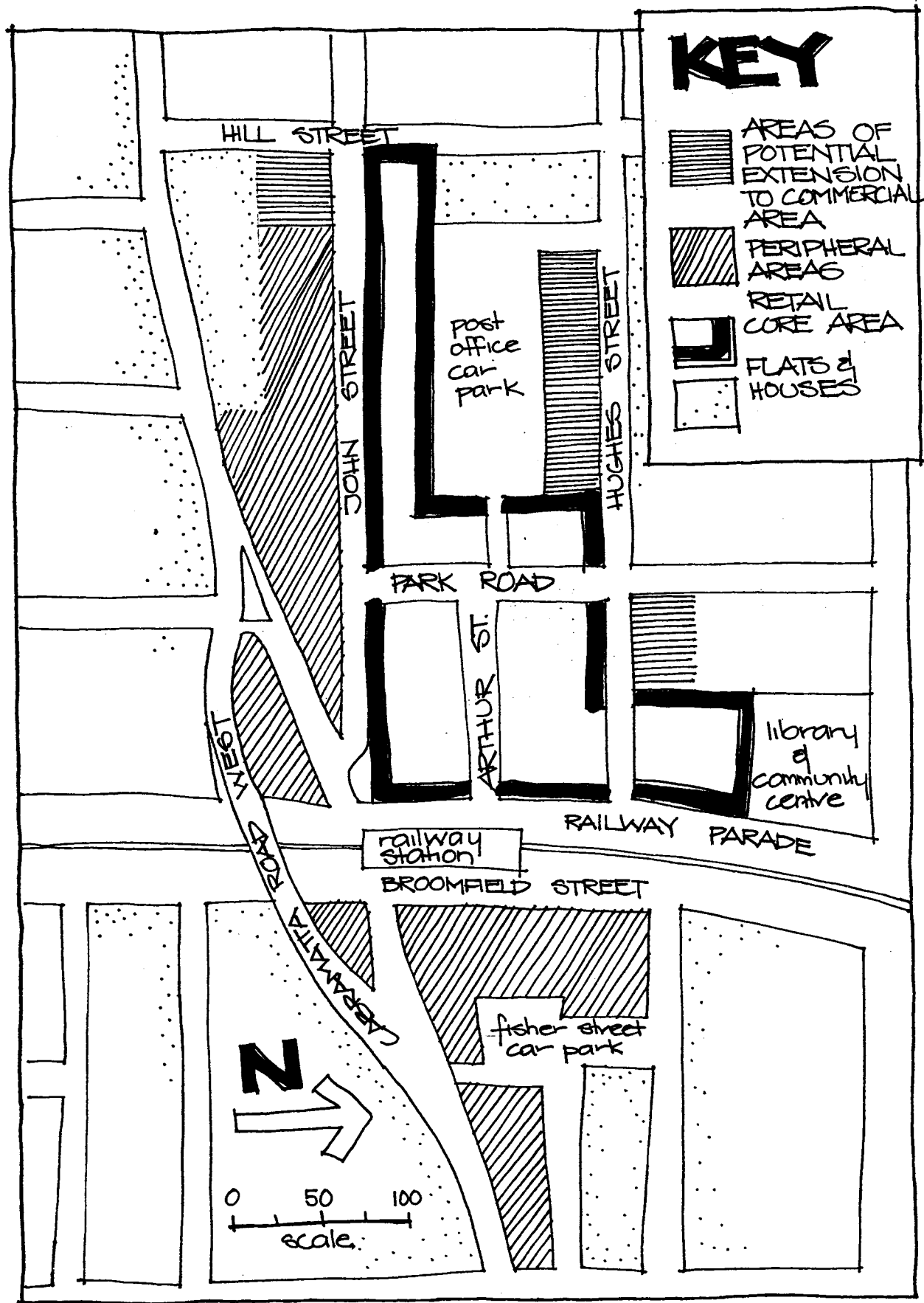
The structure of Cabramatta, as indicated in Figure 4:4, is not complicated it is, after all, a centre that occupies only a few street blocks.

The retail core area which extends west from the railway line is the major element in the centre and includes the north side of John Street and the Park Rd. area. This is the centre of activity and is particularly distinguished by the concentration of Indo-Chinese businesses. The core area is supported by smaller areas which could be considered as peripheral retailing; financial and civic areas.

As is the case with many centres that have developed around a railway station the centre is split into two sections one of which plays a much lesser role. The commercial area on the eastern side is of much lesser significance and includes a neighbourhood shopping area and some peripheral commercial uses such as a furniture showroom.

A further significant feature of the centre is that it is surrounded by residential flat buildings which substantially reduces the potential for expansion in the centre but increases the number of people living within walking distance.

A study of the centre carried out by FCC in 1984 identified only a few minor areas as suitable for expansion of the commercial area as indicated in Figure 4:4. (FCC 1984B:6-7) The extension of the commercial area along Hughes St. adjoining the Post Office car park was the most significant extension proposed.



**FIG 4-4
STRUCTURE
CABRAMATTA CENTRE**

4.2.3 Circulation

The circulation system in the centre is well organised with a distinct hierarchy of road use indicated diagrammatically in Figure 4:5.

Cabramatta Rd takes traffic past the centre while Hill St and Hughes St act as distributors for centre traffic directing it into parking areas.

Although this system is easy to comprehend and encourages movement around the centre a large number of vehicles use John St in search of a car space. (FCCC 1984A:37) This reduces the ease of pedestrian movement in the core areas of John Street and Park Road.

This problem has been recognised by Fairfield Council who propose to reinforce the existing circulation system primarily by: eliminating access to car parks from internal streets; removing a small internal carpark which is no longer appropriately located since the centre expanded to the north; and making Arthur St one way south. (FCC 1984B:39-43) These actions should reduce the number of vehicles travelling through the retail area unnecessarily.

2.2.4 Environment

The physical environment of Cabramatta is poor and the commercial centre is no exception. It does nothing to promote an immediate perception of a centre that people enjoy being in.

Many people expressed to the author feelings of dissatisfaction with the way Cabramatta looks and the strength of such feelings was such that it was often mentioned as a factor that could influence an eventual move out of the area.

The commercial area has no trees, shade or shelter and almost no spaces which can be used for the multitude of informal activities that can increase the vitality of the centre such as market areas, exhibition and performance areas. Indeed in Cabramatta there are not even spaces where one can sit and enjoy the passing parade.

Despite the lack of support given by the physical environment the centre is vital and interesting. The development of a sympathetic environment should increase the range of activities which can be found in the centre.

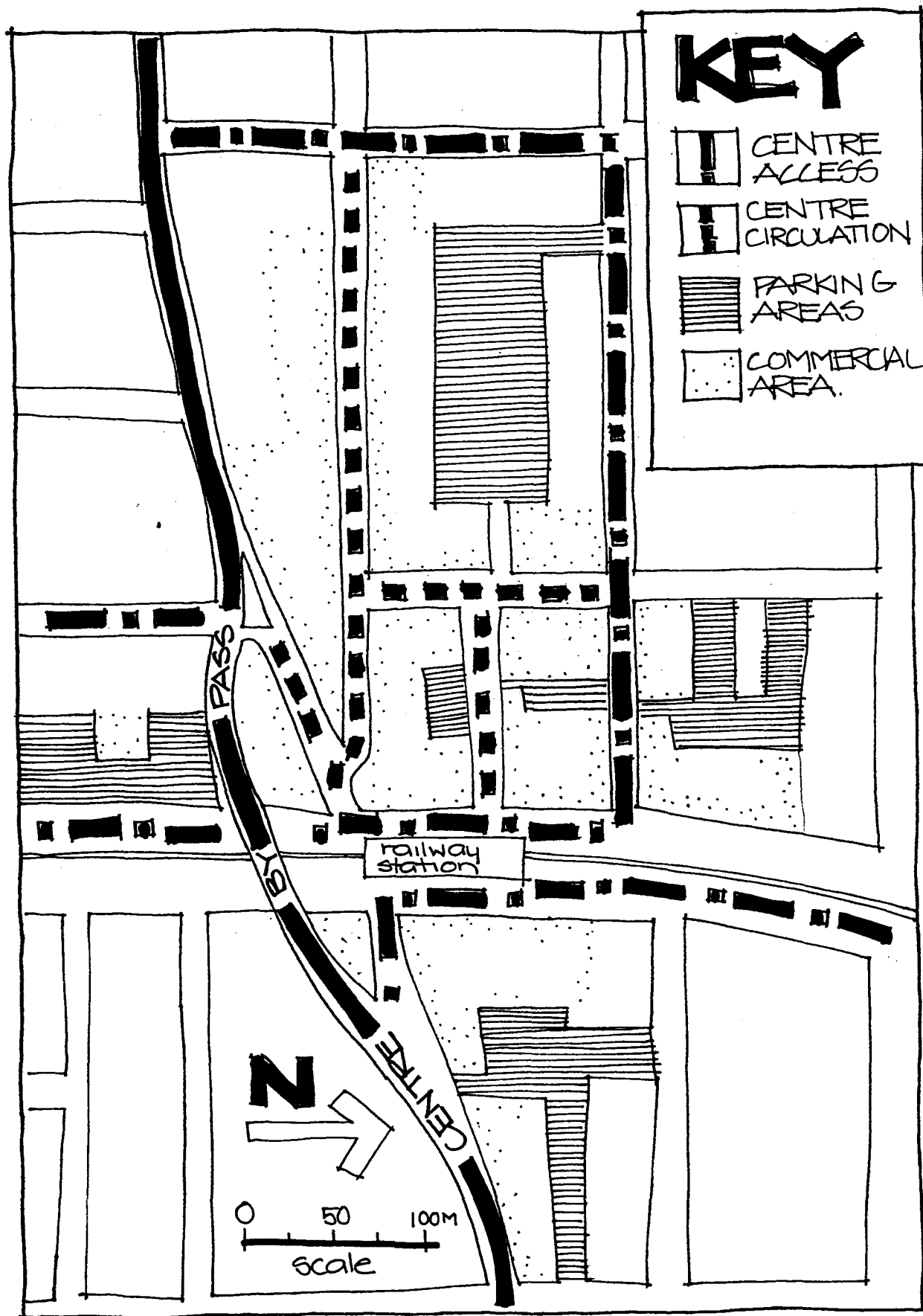


FIG 4:5
CIRCULATION
GABRAMATTA CENTRE

4.3 GROWTH

The amount of floorspace occupied for both retail and office purposes in Cabramatta has increased despite forecasts made in 1976 that there would not be sufficient retail expenditure to generate a demand for additional floorspace. This forecast was based on the assumption that the trade area, which was already built out would not expand and that, therefore, there would be no opportunity for growth. It was further predicted that "even if the total centre was to achieve a higher level of profitability, by 1991, given no floor space additions, 985 m2 of floorspace would be redundant." (Urban Systems p.9).

Contrary to this prediction the floorspace in Cabramatta has increased by an average of 1600m2 per year since 1976, a total increase for the ten year period from 1976 to 1986 of 56%. The possibility of a significant change in the ethnic structure of the catchment population, capable of altering the demand for floorspace in the centre, was not considered in this 1976 report.

TABLE 4:1 CABRAMATTA FLOORSPLACE 1976-1986.

TYPE	1976	1983	1985	1986
Retail	22575m2	26077m2	28047m2	30000m2
Office	5268m2	10762m2	12801m2	14000m2

NOTE: Floorspace is given as Gross Leaseable Area
1986 figure is based on development approvals given for additional floorspace to May 1985.

SOURCE: 1976: Urban Systems
1983: FCC 1984 p.21-2
1985-6: Author.

4.3.1 Asian Business

The impact of Asian business can be ascertained by reference to Table 4:2 which compares the number of businesses operated by Asian people in October 1983 and April 1985.

In this 18 month period the number of Asian outlets doubled to 140, far more than the increase in the number of outlets during this period. The extent of this change becomes even more remarkable when it is realised that the first Asian business opened in Cabramatta in 1978. That is, in only 7 years Asian outlets have increased their representation from zero to 39% of all businesses in the centre.

The relationship between the increase in floorspace occupied by the Indo-Chinese and the increase in their population in Fairfield is indicated in Figure 4:6. The growth of the Indo-Chinese population and Indo-Chinese business was the major factor that was not considered in the 1976 assessment of the future of the centre. These changes were brought about as the result of policies made at the Federal Level regarding immigration and initial settlement as was discussed in Sections 2&3.

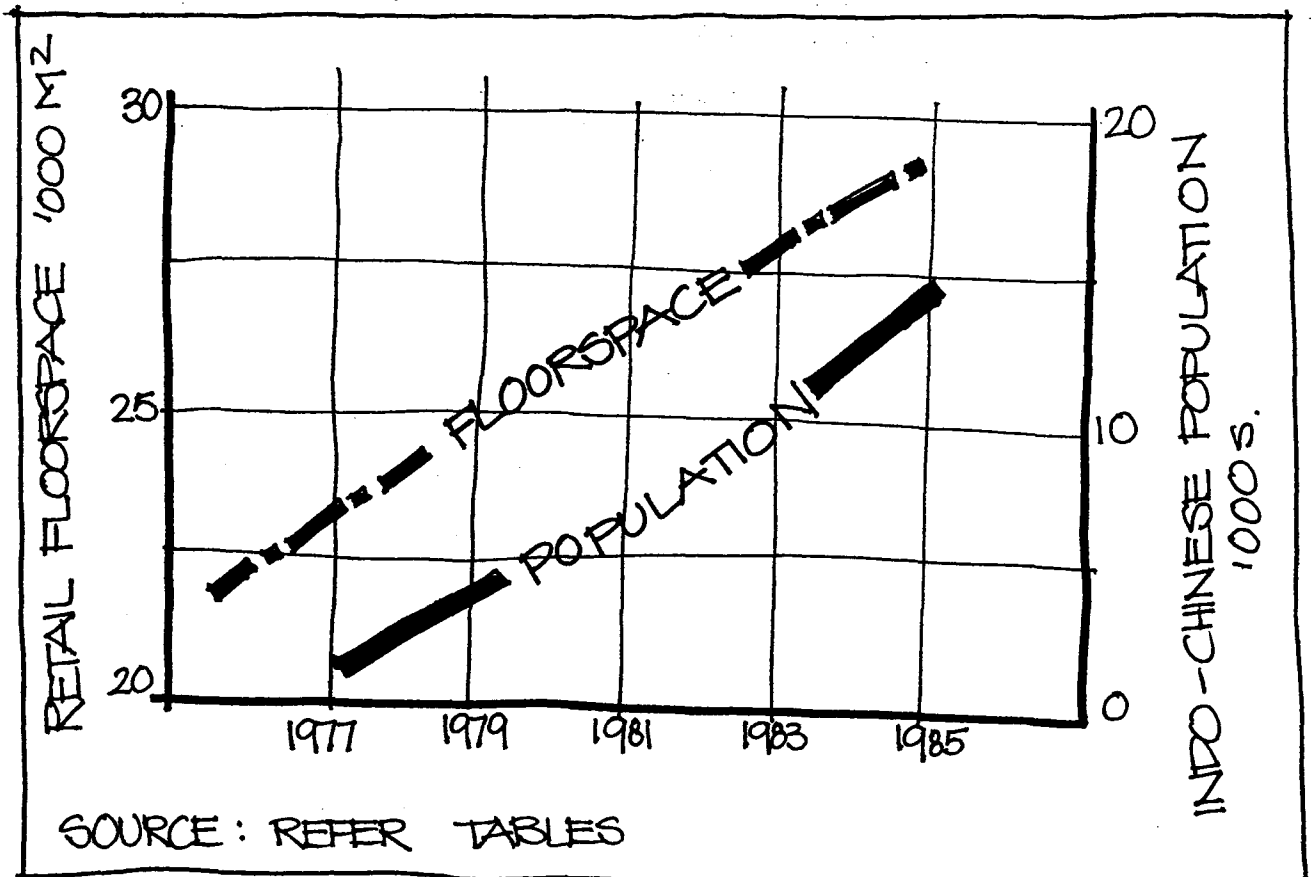


FIG 2:6
FLOORSPACE & INDO-CHINESE
CABRAMATTA 1976-86

TABLE 4:2 BUSINESS OUTLETS IN CABRAMATTA

Outlet Category	NUMBER OF OUTLETS					
	Asian				Total	
	1983 NO.	% total	1985 NO.	% total	1983	1985
Retail-Food	16	29.6	33	50.7	54	65
Retail-Other	16	18.8	32	33.0	85	97
Restaurant/ Cafe	17	48.5	33	68.7	35	48
Service- Personal	4	13.3	6	18.7	30	32
Service- Financial	2	4.7	4	9.0	42	44
Service- Medical	7	24.1	14	40.0	29	35
Recreation/ Other	3	23.0	8	50.0	13	16
Industry	6	66.6	10	83.3	9	12
Vacant	n.a.	-	n.a.	-	9	10
TOTAL	71	23.4	140	38.8	306	359

SOURCE: 1983: Fairfield City Council.
1985: Author

4.4 CHANGE

4.4.1 Recent Developments

Since 1983 a significant proportion of the commercial area has been redeveloped or renovated as indicated in Figure 4:7.

New developments have been concentrated towards the edge of the centre particularly towards the intersection of Park Rd. and Hughes St. shifting the focus of the centre away from John St. They have occurred, primarily, in a small number of major developments as indicated in Table 4:3.

TABLE 4:3. MAJOR DEVELOPMENT APPROVALS - CABRAMATTA.

NAME	DESCRIPTION	NETT INCREASE IN FLOORSPACE	COMPLETION
Cavallero	9 shops & office space	800m2 - retail 800m2 - office	1983 1984
Cabramatta Plaza	38 shops & supermarket	3200m2 - retail	1984
Dept. of Social S.	office space & cafe	1575m2 - office 150m2 - cafe	1985
Brescia	showroom & storage	2205m2	1984
Calabro	22 shops & supermarket	2069m2 - retail	1986
Old Police Station	9 shops & offices	700m2- retail 700m2- office	1986

SOURCE: Author from FCC records.

4.4.2 Retail

The amount of retail floorspace available in Cabramatta has increased steadily since 1976 but the growth in space is only one facet of the changes to the retail space.

The nature of the business area has changed and there has been a movement towards a greater number of smaller outlets. Three of the major retailers have left since 1980: Venture; Coles and Red S. These stores have been renovated and turned into 2 or more shops. In the case of Red S, the most recent example, there will be 16 small shops and a supermarket, replacing one supermarket, without increasing the amount of retail floorspace in the development. This trend towards smaller business units is further evident in the number of premises that are supporting more than one retail outlet such as the one pictured in Figure 4:8.

New developments will further accentuate this trend. The proposal to redevelop the vacant site on the corner of Park Rd and Hughes St. makes provision for a series of food stalls sharing a common eating area. Food centres using this system are already operating in Dixon St.

4.4.3 Office

The increase in office space has been particularly dramatic reflecting growth in offices of government departments and financial institutions operating in Cabramatta.

In 1984/5 branches of the Departments of Youth and Community Services, Social Security and the Commonwealth Employment Service have opened in Cabramatta. These offices occupy large amounts of high quality, high profile office space of a type that is not normally provided in suburban shopping centres. They are important in developing a role for Cabramatta as a multi-purpose centre.

Although these offices do not service the Indo-Chinese population exclusively and the government does have a policy of decentralising such services there is little doubt that these offices would not have opened in Cabramatta without the Indo-Chinese.

The expansion and renovation of the banks in John St. has also significantly increased the amount of office floorspace in the centre. The banks now form a distinct financial precinct opposite the main shopping area. These banks are exceptionally large for branches in a suburban shopping centre, reflecting the amount of business they do and the extra space occupied by migrant information services.

The "Study of Major Urban Centres of Western Sydney" completed for WESROC in 1984 predicts that growth in office space will continue until 2001. Retail floorspace, however, is predicted to remain static once those developments which have already been given approval are constructed." (Hirst Consulting Services et al. p.149)

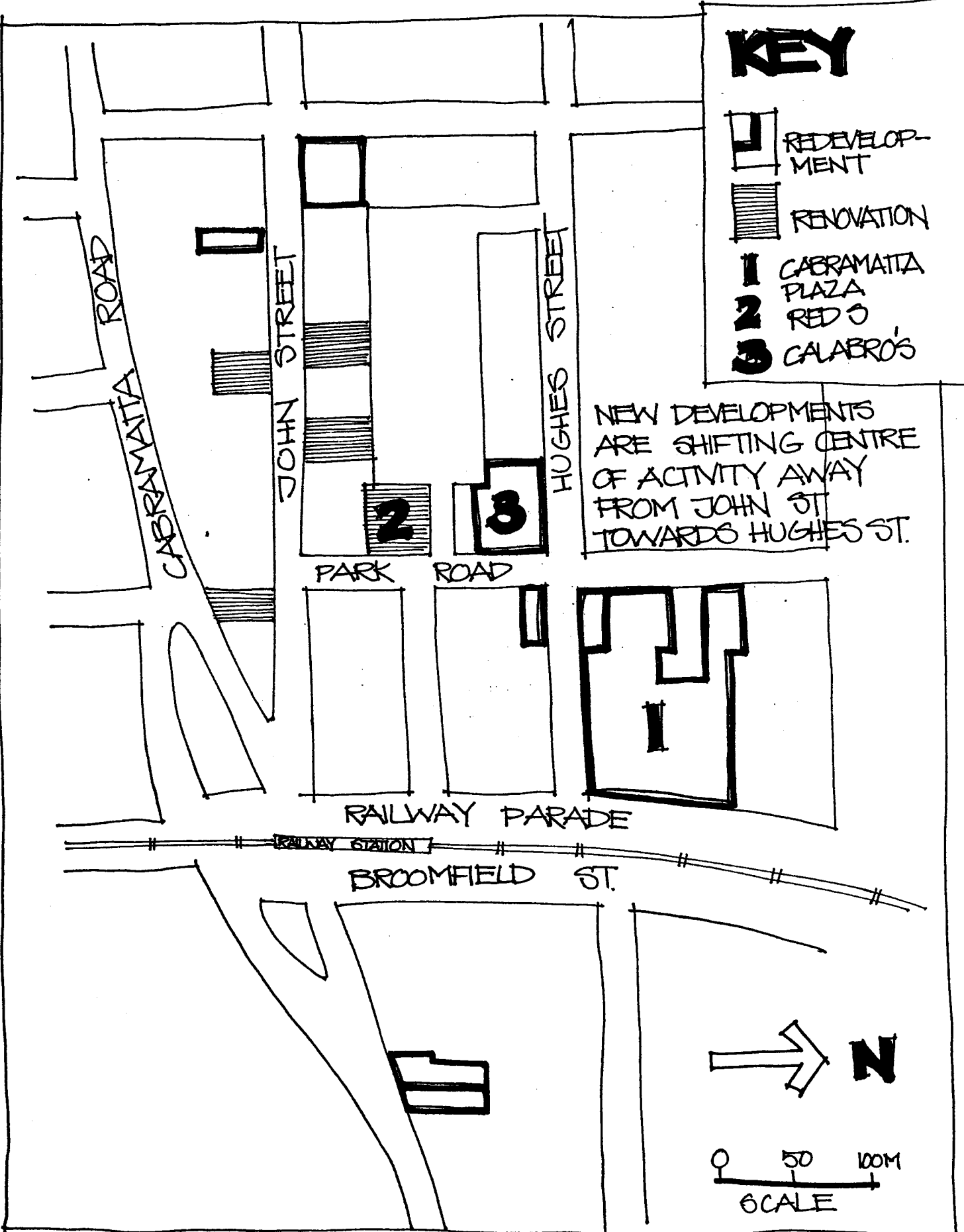


FIG 4.7
RENOVATION & REDEVELOPMENT
CABRAMATTA CENTRE

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FIGURE 4:8
 FABRIC AND JEWELLERY SHOPS —
 JOHN STREET, CABRAMATTA.
 PREMISES WHICH ACCOMMODATE TWO
 DISTINCT BUSINESSES — ARE ONE
 METHOD OF REDUCING RENT AND
 MAKING THE MOST OF LIMITED
 PRIME FLOORSPACE

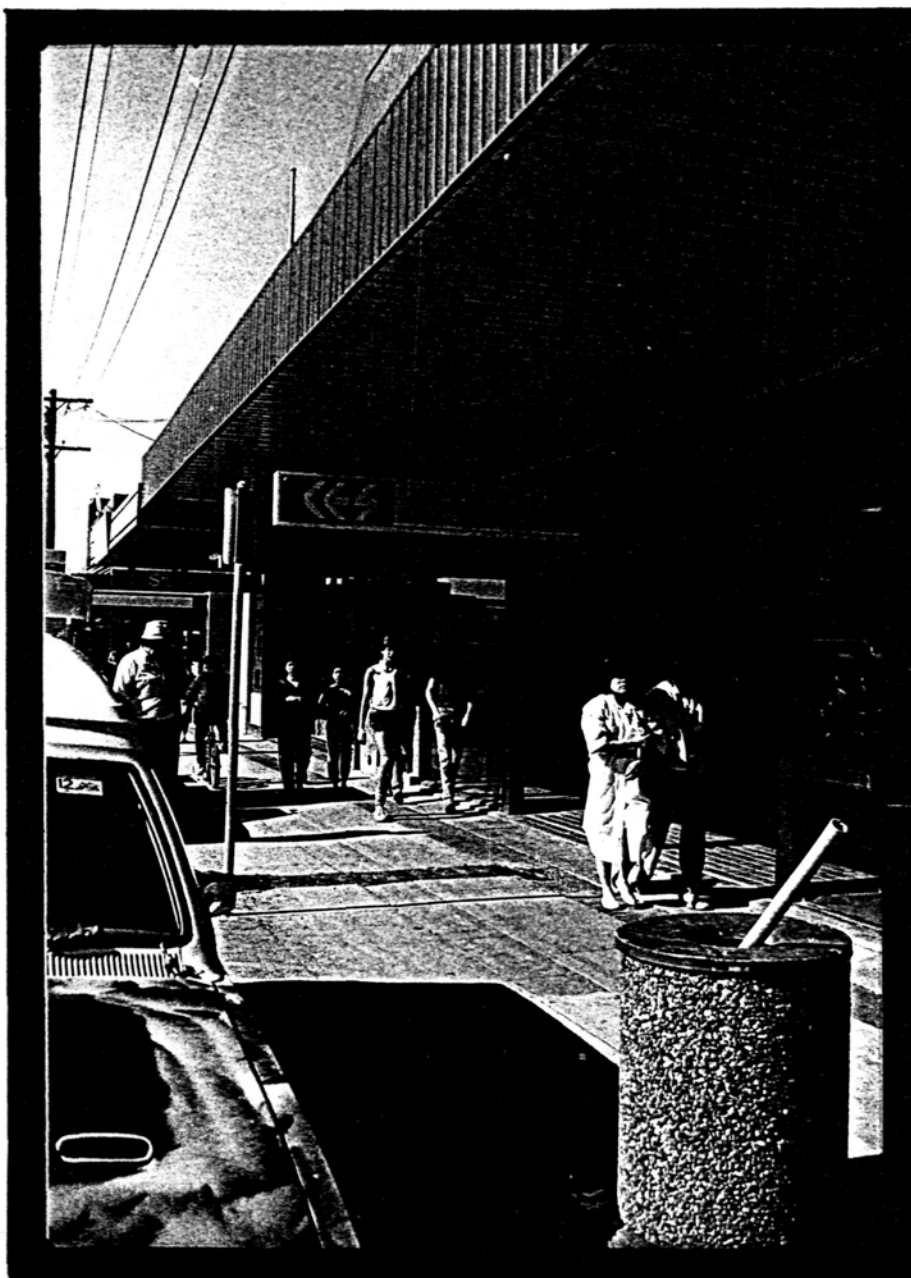
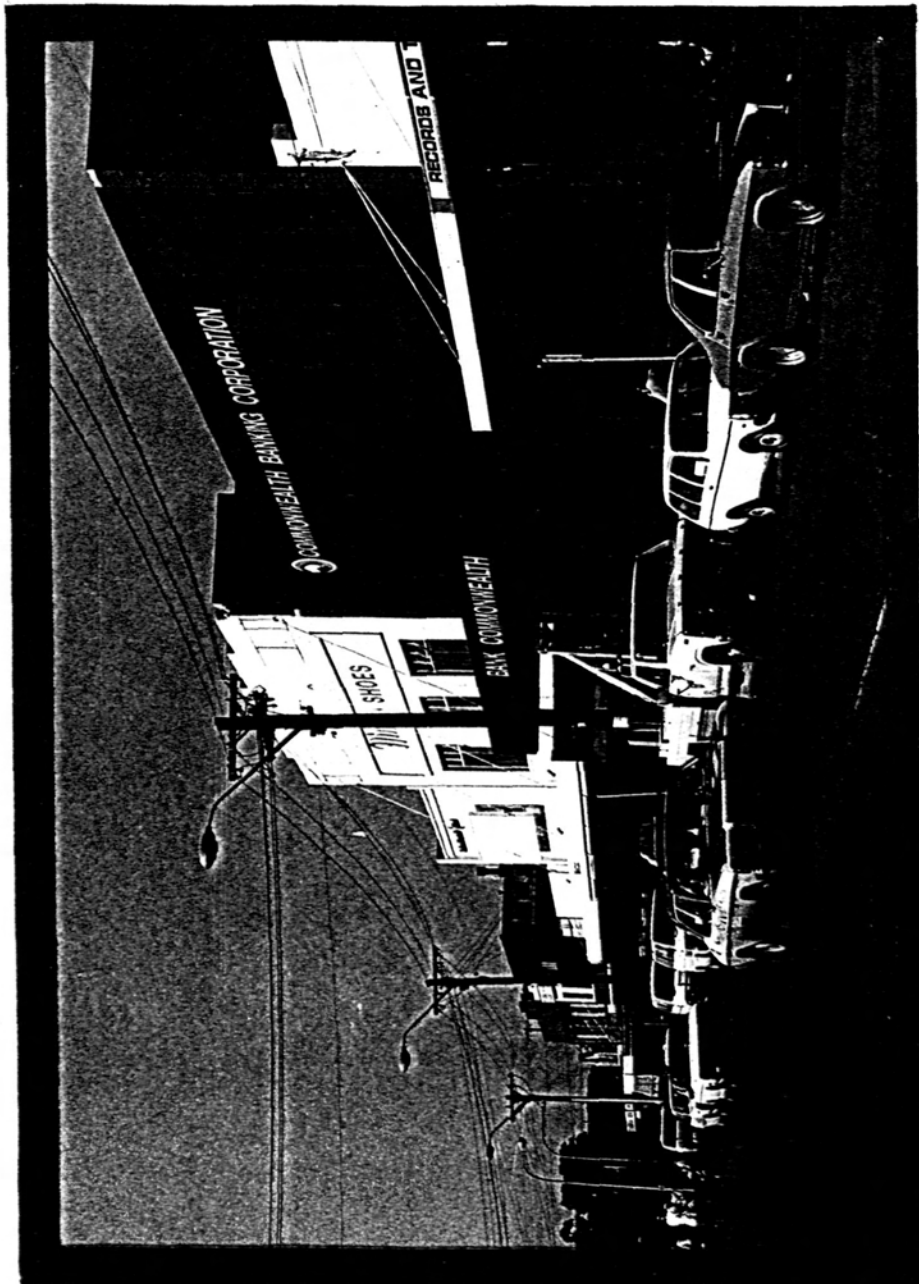


FIGURE 4:9
COMMONWEALTH EMPLOYMENT SERVICE,
JOHN ST., CABRAMATTA. THIS OFFICE
OPENED EARLY IN 1985 - GOVERNMENT
OFFICES INCREASE THE DIVERSITY OF
SERVICES AVAILABLE IN THE CENTRE
AND SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASE THE DEMAND
FOR OFFICE FLOORSPACE IN THE CENTRE

FIGURE 4:10
BANKS IN JOHN STREET,
CABRAMATTA. CABRAMATTA
HAS A DISTINCT FINANCIAL
AREA ON THE SOUTH
SIDE OF JOHN STREET.
MANY BANKS HAVE
INCREASED THEIR
FLOOR AREA AND/OR
RENOVATED OVER
THE PAST TWO
YEARS.



4.4.4 Property value.

The value of property in Cabramatta commercial area has increased dramatically since 1980 when the total value of land in the commercial area was estimated by the Valuer General to be \$12.8 million. The most recent valuation in July 1983 put the value of land in the centre at \$26.8 million, that is, an increase of more than 100% in 3 years.

As there have been no extensions to the commercial area in this period the increase is wholly related to an increase in the value of existing properties.

This trend appears, through analysis of sales since 1983, to be continuing. Properties in John St. have increased by an average of 53% between 1983 & 1985, and properties with good quality improvements are now selling for \$925/m² of site area. The increase in the value of properties in Hughes St. which are not zoned commercial has been even greater. These properties have doubled in value since 1982 due to speculation that Fairfield Council will designate them for commercial use in the future. These properties are now selling for 240/m², for their land content only.

The participation of the Asian community in the property market in Cabramatta is increasing:

- * more than one-third of properties sold since 1980 have been acquired by people with Asian names. While this is not an accurate assessment of the involvement of the Indo-Chinese community in the Cabramatta property market it does give an indication of the increase in participation. Previously there were no properties owned by people with an Asian background in Cabramatta Commercial Centre.

- * Asian ownership of properties is becoming significant, properties owned by people with an oriental background are indicated in Figure 4:11. Asian businessmen have been particularly active in buying properties on the fringe of the centre that are not yet designated commercial.

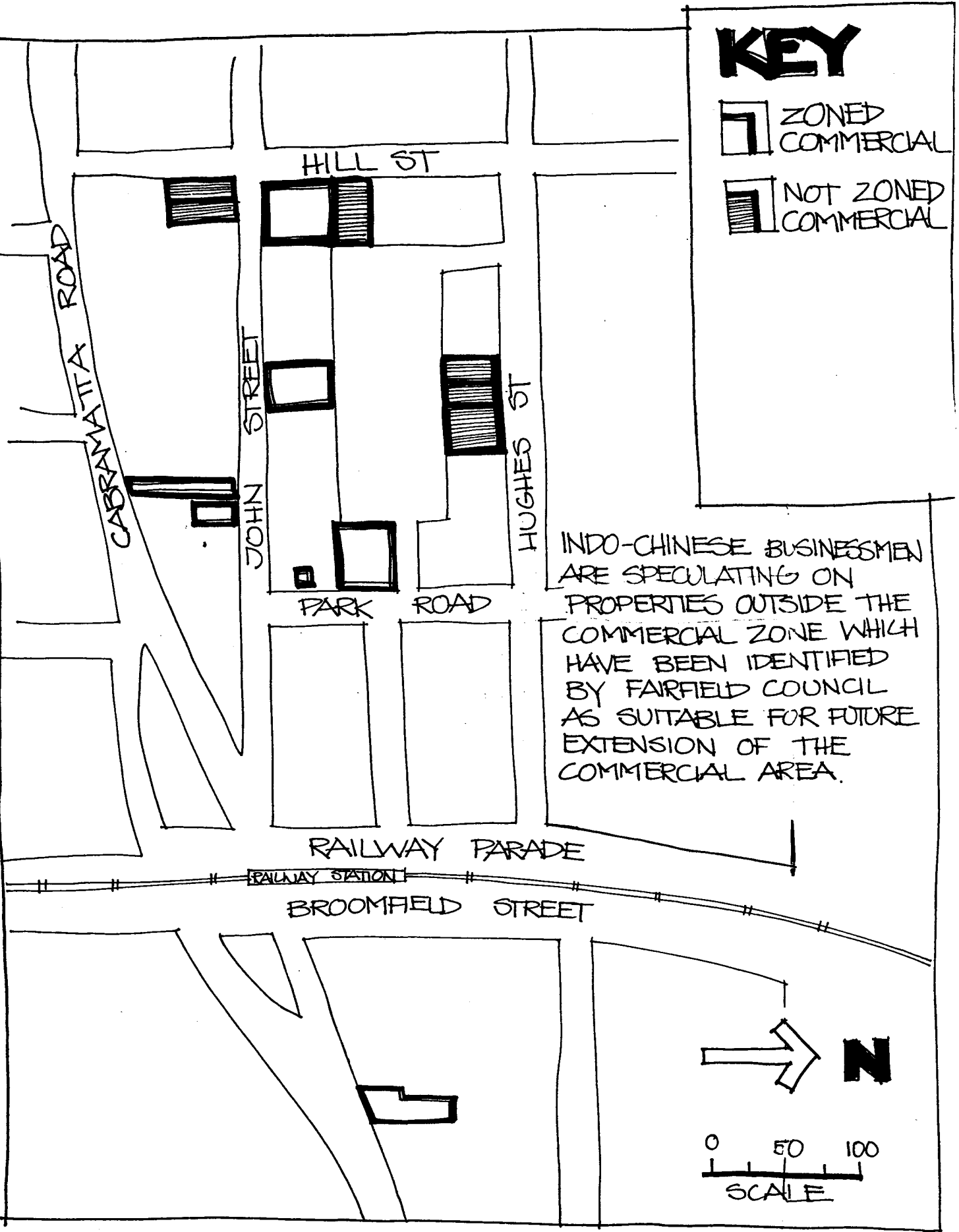


FIG 4.11
ASIAN OWNERSHIP
CABRAMATTA CENTRE

4.4.5 Rental Market

The rental return on property in Cabramatta is also increasing as part of the cycle of rent and property increases that has been instigated by the demand for floorspace on the part of would be Indo-Chinese businessmen. This has created, as expressed in a recent article, "a superheated economic ghetto. It is roaring along in a booming inflationary spiral that pays scant heed to fits and starts in the national economy." (Warneminde 1985:54)

While this quote may be an overstatement a rental and property market that is independent of the general market does appear to have developed. This is related to the catchment population for the centre. Many of the traders want to attract a specific sector of the population and Cabramatta is located in the optimum position to attract these people.

The attraction of the centre for particular traders is also evident in the exchange of large sums of money as a premium paid to enter into business. In Calabro's development, on the corner of Hughes St. and Park Rd., for example, prospective lessees have made an upfront payment of \$10,000 merely to secure the right to lease a shop. Established Indo-Chinese shopkeepers now have a vested interest in keeping rents high. Significant sums are exchanged to buy out existing businesses, reportedly from \$10,000-\$40,000 depending on the location of the business. (Warneminde 1985: 54-5) The Indo-Chinese have created in Cabramatta a rental market which effectively prices non-Indo-Chinese businesses out.

ETHNIC-CENTRE

5.0 INDO-CHINESE IN CABRAMATTA COMMERCIAL CENTRE

The Indo-Chinese have created in Cabramatta commercial centre a place with which they are readily identified. The concentration of the target population for Indo-Chinese business in the immediate residential areas has enabled the development of an extensive range of retail outlets and services specifically for the Indo-Chinese community.

5.1 The Importance of Ethnic Centres

The development of a centre which fosters community life and reflects the identity of a particular ethnic community is important to migrant, and particularly refugee, communities. This is against the trend in western society for local life to become less important as mobility and a preference for anonymity become more important.

The roles that an ethnic centre may fill are complex. A study in the USA cited by Burnley (1985:168) identifies 5 major functions which are important at the neighbourhood or local community level:

- * production & consumption of goods & services which are part of daily living
- * transmission of prevailing values or, in the case of ethnic communities, traditional cultural values
- * social control
- * participation in groups which influence socialisation & social control
- * mutual support

5.1.1 The establishment of Cabramatta as an ethnic centre

The establishment of ethnic enclaves, usually accompanied by ethnic business, has been characteristic of the settlement of ethnic minorities in industrialised countries. (Ward 1983:1) The development of Cabramatta as a commercial area for the Indo-Chinese is not unusual of itself, but it is unusual because of its location in the outer suburbs and because of the numbers of businesses and the speed with which they have been established.

The strength of the development of centres of ethnic business is often directly related to the extent of variation of the migrant community from the host community in terms of:

- physical appearance
- culture/lifestyle
- religion
- language

This has been a significant factor in the growth of Indo-Chinese business. The extent of variation between the Indo-Chinese and the host community in Cabramatta could hardly have been greater, they looked different, spoke different languages, had different food and lifestyle needs creating many opportunities to meet needs that could not be accommodated by the established businesses.

The development of an area which can act as a buffer between the old way of life and the way of life of the host community is an important element in successful resettlement. The development of centres which support the maintenance of former lifestyles is, in turn, an integral element in the development of a multi-cultural society. It allows not only the preservation of lifestyles and languages for the current generation but it also allows these to be passed onto their Australian born children. Cabramatta is operating as such a centre for the Indo-Chinese in Sydney.

The development of Cabramatta as an identifiable Indo-Chinese centre was assisted by these needs and given impetus by the success and extent of Indo-Chinese business originally established in response to them. Cabramatta is acting as a focus for the Indo-Chinese because of these psychological needs and also for a number of more practical reasons:

- it provides one stop shopping for the Asian customer
- the high level of competition provides goods that are cheap and of high quality. Cabramatta is widely acknowledged, by the Asian community in Sydney, as being much more competitive than Dixon St, in Sydney City, for both goods and meals.

5.2. Establishment of Ethnic Business in Cabramatta

Cabramatta has developed into a suburban commercial centre with twin roles as a neighbourhood convenience centre and as a specialised centre for the Indo-Chinese community. The establishment of ethnic business in Cabramatta appears to share many of the characteristics evident both in the establishment of small businesses generally and in businesses established by ethnic communities elsewhere.

5.2.1 Similarity with small business elsewhere

Small businesses established in Cabramatta by the Indo-Chinese share many factors that have been identified as important to the survival of small business generally including:

- * their ability to supply a wide range of requirements which may be needed unexpectedly or in small quantities
- * their ability to specialise
- * their ability to provide a personalised service
(Bureau of Industry Economics 1981:8)

The importance of each of these factors has been intensified in the case of the Indo-Chinese because of their concentration in Cabramatta and their variation from the host community in needs and attitude.

5.2.1 Concentration of target population

Cabramatta is located in an area where the Indo-Chinese are concentrated. Research in Britain has identified the nexus between the location of ethnic shops and residents as a particularly significant factor in the establishment of ethnic business. (Aldrich 1984:195-9, Mars & Ward 1984:2) This factor is evident in the suburb of Cabramatta as was discussed in Section 3.3.

Early business establishment in particular tends to be distinguished by strong community support based on ethnic ties. This support allows businesses a degree of independence from the host community and provides an initial cushion of customers. Concentration of the population is essential if this support is to be utilised in business establishment. A survey of Vietnamese shopkeepers in Melbourne in 1982 found them to be very dependent on ethnic customers with respondents to the survey indicating that 69% of their customers were from the same ethnic origin. (Hearn 1982:26)

Residential concentration can also encourage established shopkeepers to move out leaving their customers to patronise the ethnic businesses remaining. (Auster 1984:49) This is a phenomenon that is becoming more apparent in Cabramatta as established businesses are being taken over by Indo-Chinese businessmen. Table 4:2 indicated that while the total number of business outlets operating in Cabramatta has increased the number of non-Asian outlets has decreased. This withdrawal of previously established businesses has encouraged an increasing diversity of Indo-Chinese businesses.

FIGURE 5.1
 BING LEE CENTRE,
 JOHN ST. CABRAMATTA.
 ALTHOUGH THIS STORE IS
 OWNED BY AN AUSTRALIAN
 BORN CHINESE FAMILY
 IT PROVIDES A GOOD
 EXAMPLE OF THE
 SUCCESS OF ASIAN
 BUSINESS.



5.2.2 Cultural variation- goods and services

The degree of cultural variation from the host community also plays a significant role in influencing the development of ethnic business. The greater the range of products and services required by the ethnic community which are distinctive to that community the greater the range of distinct business opportunities generated by that community. This variation can provide the motivation and market for the initial establishment of business and once businesses have established they can use their ethnic sub-market as a platform from which to expand into the wider community. (Mars 1984:15, Robinson 1983:258, Ward 1983:4)

In Cabramatta this variation initially helped to support the development of food stores and restaurants, both businesses which require relatively little capital to establish, but the inability of Australian wholesalers to supply the goods required has created many other business opportunities. Wholesaling, importing and import substitution businesses have all been developed in response to the particular needs of the Indo-Chinese. For example factories are now being developed around Cabramatta which produce such things as frozen dim sims, bean sprouts, soy sauce and Asian confectionary.

Cultural variation can also promote the establishment of services. Traditional medical practices, such as acupuncture clinics can now be found in Cabramatta along with schools for a number of schools of the martial arts.

The lack of cultural variation has been identified as one of the principal reasons why some minority groups have a very low rate of small business participation. (Auster 1984:48, Brooks 1983)



FIGURE 5:2

SHRINE ON ROOF OF HOUSE IN FAIRFIELD.
THE INFLUENCE OF THE INDO-CHINESE
COMMUNITY IS EVIDENT IN MANY, SOME-
TIMES SUBTLE WAYS, ADDING TO THE
DIVERSITY AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE
AREA.



FIGURE 5:3

VIDEO HIRE SHOP - JOHN ST. ARCADE.
VIDEO HIRE PROVIDES A POPULAR FORM
OF CHEAP ENTERTAINMENT FOR
MANY PEOPLE AND IS PARTICULARLY
POPULAR AMONG NON-ENGLISH
SPEAKING COMMUNITIES AND THE
INDO-CHINESE ARE NO EXCEPTION.

5.2.3 Cultural variation - attitude

The development of business in Cabramatta with the speed and strength apparent in relation to Indo-Chinese business remains a mystery to many people. They cannot understand how a refugee community could have the personal or financial resources to enter into business such a short time after arriving.

The inability to put this business establishment into the context of the pattern of small business observed in other centres has encouraged a widespread assumption that because Indo-Chinese business exists in Cabramatta now, and has been growing, it will continue to exist and grow.

The influence of the Indo-Chinese cannot, of course, be explained through reference to any other centre in Western Sydney. The reasons why they have been able to establish such a large number of businesses relate not only to differences in needs but also to differences in attitude. This is the factor that is often overlooked in assessing the reasons why businesses have been able to establish.

The sense of kinship within families, and the extension of this bond to extended families and clans has helped people to establish through pooling of resources and provision of assistance through cheap labour and advice. The pooling of labour has helped to reduce the amount of capital required to establish a business. Empirical research has shown that there are opportunities to substitute labour for capital in small business. (Storey 1983:3)

The desire to help other members of the community also extends to patronising Indo-Chinese business to keep the resources of the community within the community.

The conditions and attitudes that have encouraged the development of business by the Indo-Chinese will not however necessarily continue. It may be that as part of the assimilation process support for Indo-Chinese businesses and the willingness to provide assistance in terms of capital and labour may lessen.

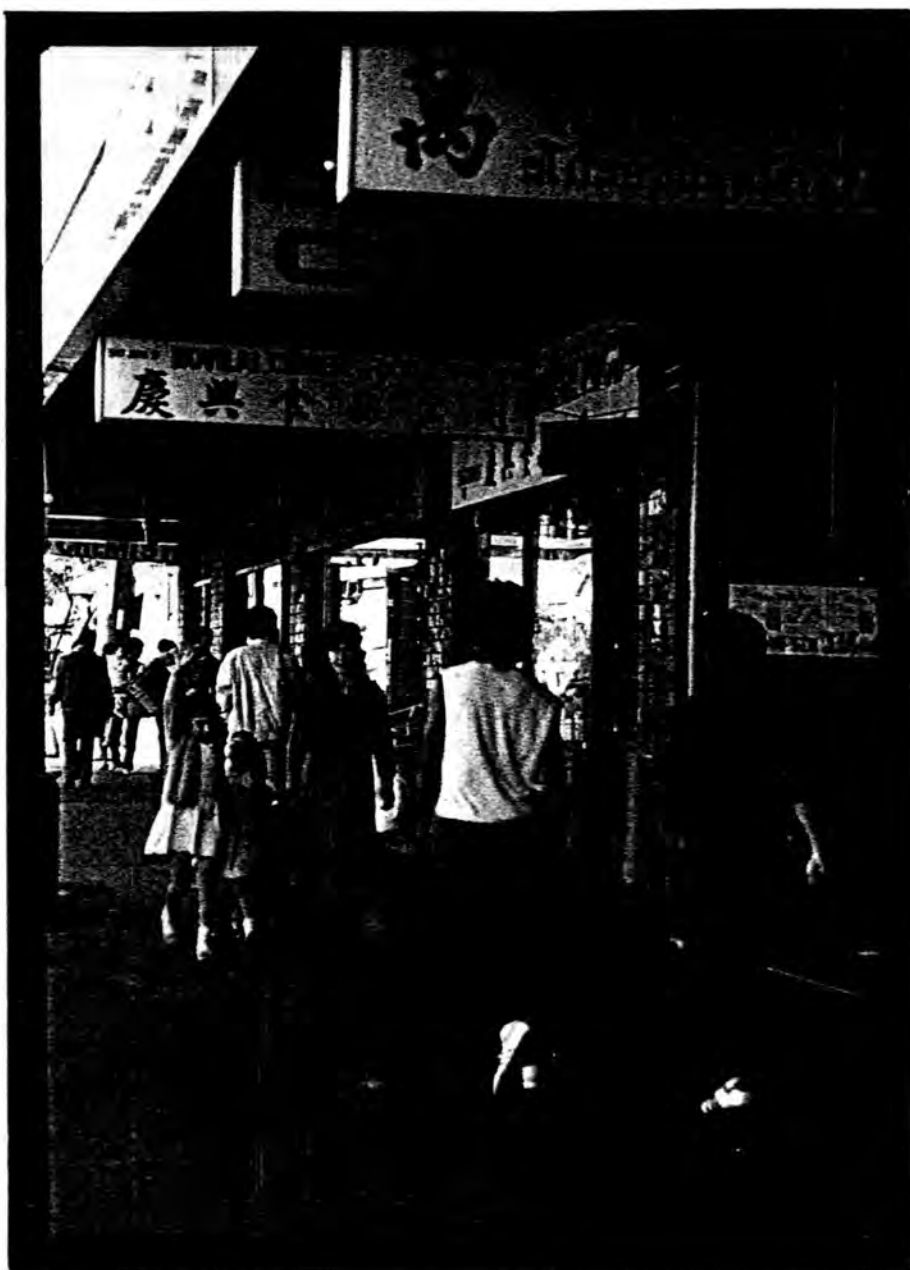


FIGURE 5:4

CINEMA JOHN ST. CABRAMATTA. CABRAMATTA IS DEVELOPING A RANGE OF RECREATION FACILITIES DIRECTED TOWARDS THE INDO-CHINESE INCLUDING THE CINEMA PICTURED, NIGHT CLUBS, MAJONG CLUBS AS WELL AS CAFES AND RESTAURANTS.

5.3 Operation of Businesses

Indo-Chinese businesses in Cabramatta are typically, small business units operating for long hours established with savings pooled among family members.

5.3.1 Small business units.

The Indo-Chinese businesses in Cabramatta are predominantly very small business units. The only exceptions are the larger food stores. The Bing Lee electrical goods store is part of a chain owned by an Australian Chinese family who have been in Australia for three generations.

The demand for very small business units is evident in:

- * the number of premises which support multiple business units, one of which was illustrated in Fig 4:8.

- * new developments, such as those identified as 2 & 3 on Figure 4:7, which are making provision for shops which are little more than stalls, because the demand is for premises which allow people to trade with as little capital input as possible.

5.3.2 Finance.

Access to finance is crucial to the establishment of any business. Ethnic businesses are financed not only by financial institutions but also from savings which are increased through the pooling of resources within a family group.

The relative importance of the different sources of finance is indicated by a survey of Vietnamese businesses in Melbourne in 1982 which found that the funding for the establishment of their businesses had come from the following sources:

- * 85% used personal savings
- * 62% borrowed from banks
- * 38% obtained funds from the family
- * 35% obtained funds from ethnic friends.

(Hearn 1982:24-31).

indicating the importance of funds raised from non-institutional sources.

The ethnic Chinese, in particular, benefit from the use of funds obtained from other members of the ethnic group through the use of Chinese syndicates. This is a system whereby money is pooled, with each member of the syndicate contributing a fixed amount every month. Each member of the syndicate is then able to use the full amount of the pool once during the life of the syndicate. A typical syndicate would have 25 members contributing \$400 per month forming a pool of \$10,000.

This money can then be used to finance whatever project is at hand, commonly a business venture or a home purchase, and as it does not involve establishment fees or interest it is a cheaper as well as a more accessible form of finance.

The use of bank loans is also very important and local bank managers have indicated that they consider the Indo-Chinese to be particularly reliable customers.

5.3.3 Hours of operation

A willingness to work long hours is another factor that typifies migrant business which is evident in Indo-Chinese business in Cabramatta. (Aldrich 1984:195-8) Almost all Indo-Chinese businesses in Cabramatta operate 7 days a week opening early and closing late.

Sunday trading is particularly important in Cabramatta. It allows people who are working long hours to shop on their day off. The tendency is for this weekly shopping trip to become an outing incorporating a long lunch. Sunday trading also encourages people to travel to the centre for a special trip. So that even when people move away from the area they can return on Sundays to do their shopping and meet friends. This developing regional catchment is a significant element in the future growth of Cabramatta.

5.3.4 Family business.

The majority of Indo-Chinese businesses are family operations providing employment for members of the family.

These businesses do not, generally, have any plans for expansion and operate, like the majority of small businesses as a means of satisfying a desire for independence and to give employment opportunities to members of their immediate family. (Bureau of Industry Economics 1981:87)

5.4 Importance of Cabramatta to the Indo-Chinese

The development of Cabramatta as an identifiable Indo-Chinese centre, commonly referred to as "Vietnamatta", has had a number of implications for the Indo-Chinese community.

5.4.1 Identity

The development of Cabramatta as an Asian centre has heightened the profile of the Indo-Chinese community, at least in Sydney. It has made them impossible to ignore.

This has been an advantage in promoting the provision of specialised services for the community and it has also encouraged recognition of the business acumen of many members of the community. (Warneminde 1985)

On the reverse side it has made them an easy target for those who are intimidated by rapid changes in racial mix. The Indo-Chinese are highly visible even in a racially diverse community such as exists in Cabramatta. This has made it easy for the casual observer to overestimate their numbers. Even experienced researchers have found it difficult to accurately assess their numbers as demonstrated by a survey of ethnic business in Melbourne where it was found difficult to locate the 30 Vietnamese businesses required to fill the sample despite a general impression of proliferation. The researcher concluded from this that the combination of business concentration and easy visual identification of both shops and customers combined to give "a somewhat distorted image of Vietnamisation of an entire business area." (Hearn 1982:18)

5.4.2 Community Centre

Cabramatta's commercial functions embrace many roles which enable it to also be considered as a community focus for the Indo-Chinese. Cafes and food stores can act as meeting places and sources of information exchange. The focus of commercial activity has attracted a range of community and welfare services which are often directed towards the Indo-Chinese community, further reinforcing this role.

Cabramatta can also be viewed as a community focus because it has been acting as a base from which new residents can venture forth and has, as such, been an important element in the assimilation of the Indo-Chinese. It is a mechanism that had to be developed because the existing services could either not provide the services the Indo-Chinese required or simply did not exist.

5.4.3 Entertainment centre

Cabramatta has been acting as an entertainment centre for the Indo-Chinese, at least informally, by virtue of its function as a focal point of the community. More formal entertainment facilities have until recently required a trip to the City to Dixon St. or the Mandarin Club.

Cabramatta is beginning to develop a greater range of formal entertainment facilities as the demand for them increases. A cinema has been operating for some time and more "up-market" restaurants which include facilities for live entertainment are now being established.

Development of facilities for live entertainment is important because it gives the entertainers in the community a chance to perform. Members of the Indo-Chinese community have indicated that there are a number of talented performers among those who have migrated but they are not able to use conventional venues due to the small size of potential audiences. The development of Cabramatta as an Indo-Chinese centre provides the concentration of potential audience necessary to make the development of specialised venues practicable.

5.4.5 Employment

The proliferation of Indo-Chinese business in Cabramatta has been an important source of employment for the Indo-Chinese community. It has generated employment not only for those directly employed in small business in the centre but also in associated enterprises such as:

- * import/ wholesaling
- * import substitution
- * financial services
- * personal services.

The concentration of Indo-Chinese customers and businesses has also promoted the employment of Indo-Chinese staff by non-Indo-Chinese businesses.

The employment opportunities available in Cabramatta for the Indo-Chinese area particularly important given the high rate of unemployment amongst the Indo-Chinese community. The unemployment rate for the Vietnamese community, for example, was estimated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to be 37.6% in December 1983. (Refer Appendix 2) A higher rate of unemployment than that experienced by the general population is a common occurrence amongst the most recently arrived group of migrants who have the least developed network for finding employment. (Cox 1983:338)

The development of Indo-Chinese business in Cabramatta is an excellent example of the establishment of a self-help mechanism by a migrant community to improve the employment opportunities available to that community. In Cabramatta this mechanism has efficiently captured the resources of the community for its own benefit utilising the ability of small business to create jobs. (Storey 1983:2)

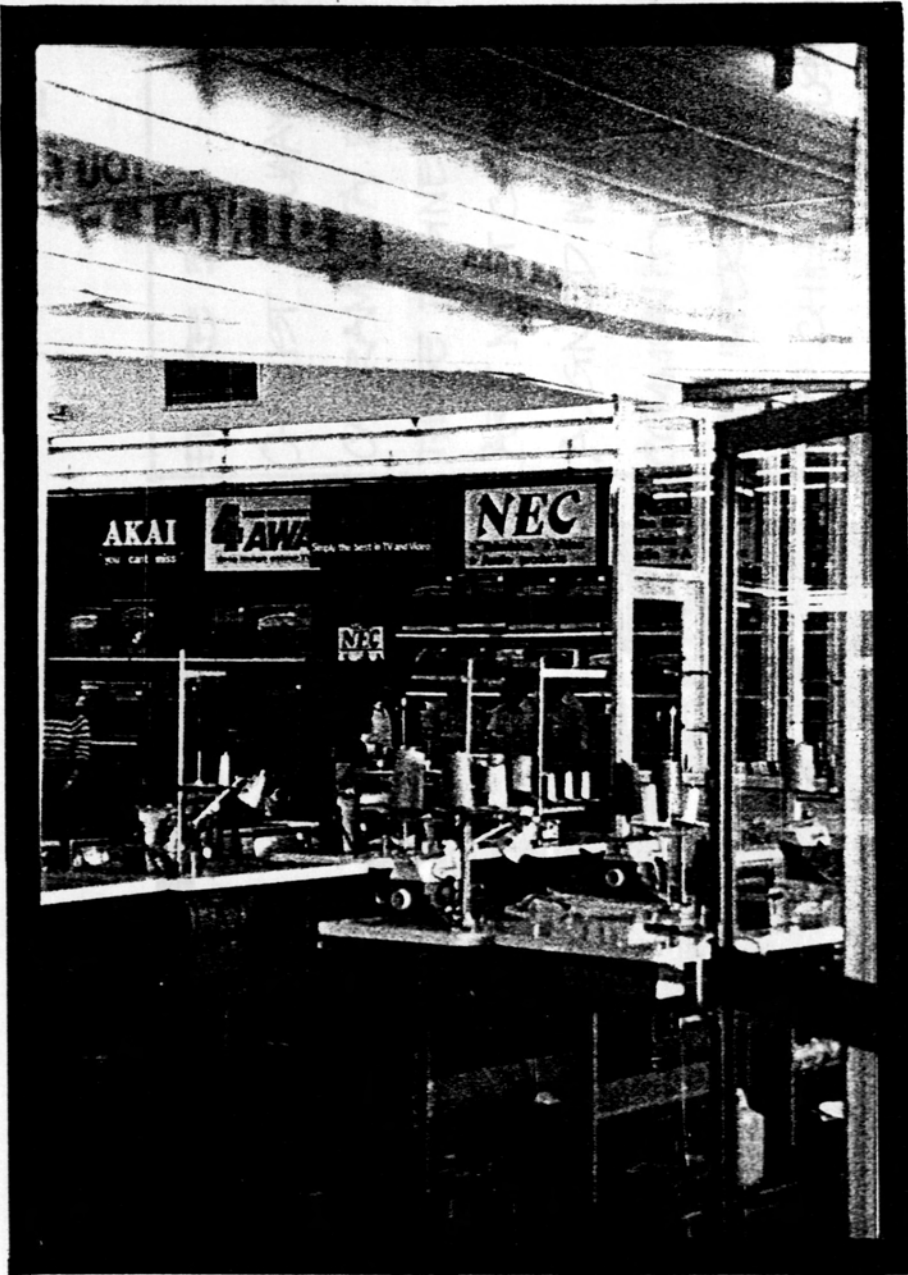


FIGURE 5.5
BING LEE, JOHN STREET.
CABRAMATTA. INDUSTRIAL SEWING
MACHINES OCCUPY PRIDE OF PLAZA.
IN THE FRONT OF THIS LARGE
ELECTRICAL GOODS STORE
ILLUSTRATING THE IMPORTANCE
OF SEWING AS AN INCOME SOURCE



FIGURE 5.6

CHEMIST RAILWAY PARADE
CABRAMATTA. EVEN
THOSE BUSINESSES THAT
ARE MOST CLOSELY
ALIGNED WITH THE HOST
COMMUNITY RECOGNISE
THE IMPORTANCE OF
INDO-CHINESE CUSTOM
FOR THEIR BUSINESS
IN CABRAMATTA.