

GARDEN HILL AND SHEARING SHED ON
ADJACENT PROPERTY,
ELTHAM-YARRA GLEN ROAD,
KANGAROO GROUND.

BUILT:

1850S? (EARLIEST PART OF
PRESENT TIMBER
BUILDINGS)¹

? NORTH SIDE ADDED

19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES
VARIOUS ALTERATIONS AND
ADDITIONS (1940¹
FIREPLACE ALTERED)

1960S BRICK HOUSE ADDED

C.1925 CANARY ISLAND PALM
(*Phoenix canariensis*)
PLANTED

THEMES ILLUSTRATED BY THIS PLACE:

EARLY SETTLEMENT

PROMINENT RESIDENTS
(ANDREW HARKNESS¹
SIR HERBERT WILLIAM
GEPP²)

FARMING

BASIS OF SIGNIFICANCE:

ILLUSTRATION OF THE THEMES
HISTORY
RARITY
ARCHITECTURE
HORTICULTURE

DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE:

LOCAL SIGNIFICANCE

EXTENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

ENTIRE BUILDING, GABLE
ROOFED SHED NEAR THE
HOUSE, IN-GROUND WATER
TANK, MATURE CANARY ISLAND
PALM TREE, SHEARING SHED
WITH IN-GROUND WATER TANK,
MATURE SITE PLANTING AND
SITE TO A RADIUS OF 50
METRES NORTH OF THE ROAD

RECOMMENDATIONS:

LOCAL PLANNING PROTECTION



Garden Hill and Shearing Shed, Eltham-Yarra Glen Road Cont.



CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:

This much altered timber house in a garden setting has significance for both the apparent early date of its oldest section and for the long period of occupation by two prominent local residents. From the 1850s¹ until the early 1920s³, Scottish pioneer settler and Kangaroo Ground farmer Andrew Harkness and his family occupied Garden Hill. In 1923 Sir Herbert William Gepp, mining metallurgist, manager, industrialist and important liberal thinker of the time, moved into Garden Hill and lived there until his death in 1954.² His descendents still live on the property. Both Harkness and Gepp are buried in the nearby Kangaroo Ground Cemetery.⁴ The interior of the quite modest building retains something of the building that Harkness (and the Shire's other pioneering settlers) lived in, particularly the large combined fireplace and bread oven in the largest room, and the coved ceilings in most of the rooms (which were all lined during the 20th century). The shearing shed is of unknown age, could well be the largest sapling framed, pre 1940 farm outbuilding in

Garden Hill and Shearing Shed, Eltham-Yarra Glen Road Cont.



Garden Hill and Shearing Shed, Eltham-Yarra Glen Road ... Cont.

the Shire and is an integral part of the site, along with the garden and mature site planting. The Canary Island Palm tree (*Phoenix canariensis*) has family historic significance and is a large example in a Shire-wide context.

HISTORY:

Original Use:	Farm house ¹
Later Use:	Hobby Farm
Original Owner:	Andrew Harkness, farmer ¹
Later Owners:	Alexander White, farmer ⁵
	Sir Herbert William Gepp ²

Andrew Harkness, a Scottish farmer, was among the earliest settlers at Kangaroo Ground and acquired property there in 1849. He and other settlers set up a school at Kangaroo Ground in 1852 with Andrew Ross as the first teacher. Harkness was an early member of the Eltham District Road Board and remained a member for 14 years. Harkness married in 1854 and had four sons and five daughters.⁶ The earliest part of the present timber house is believed to date from the 1850s and to form part of the Kangaroo Ground farm for which Harkness was first rated in 1858.¹ It stayed in his family for many years. His son-in-law, Alexander White, farmer, became the owner of the property (known at first as Kilby Park) in 1893.⁵ A house was recorded in the rate books for the first time at the beginning of White's ownership. Later, at the turn of the century, it was identified as comprising 152 acres in Lot 3 Section 2 at Kangaroo Ground.⁷ Fanny White was the owner from 1907⁸ until 1922.³

Sir Herbert William Gepp (1877-1954), who became the owner in 1923,² renamed the property Garden Hill and ran it as a hobby farm. Born in Adelaide, he came from a poor family and had to leave school in 1893 and work as a junior chemist at the Australian Explosives and Chemical Factory at Deer Park. Subsequently, Gepp had a distinguished career and earned an Australia-wide reputation. After the firm was taken over by Nobel's Explosive Co. of Glasgow, Gepp received further training in Glasgow. He married in 1905 at the Hawthorn Congregational Church.



JAMES NESS HARVESTING OATS AT GARDEN HILL
(ELHPC NO. 421)

Garden Hill and Shearing Shed, Eltham-Yarra Glen Road Cont.

Gepp was associated with major mineral companies including B.H.P. and at Broken Hill displayed concern for the welfare of workers. In 1913 he initiated the Broken Hill Progress Association, built playgrounds and arranged seaside holidays for miners' children. Gepp was connected with the manufacture of munitions in both World Wars.

During the mid 20th century Gepp was evidently a leading liberal thinker and the most prominent one associated with conservative politics.¹⁰ Later, as a friend of Prime Minister John Curtin, he was involved in planning for post-war reconstruction. Gepp returned to private industry and retired in 1950. He died in 1954 and is buried in the Kangaroo Ground Cemetery. Described as "an apostle of the role of science in industry, government and the economy", Gepp helped to establish the CSIRO.⁹

After Gepp died at Garden Hill in 1954, his son, Orwell, farmed the Kangaroo Ground property part-time. Gepp's estate was valued for probate at £91,702.⁹ Later, after Lady Gepp's death in 1963, the land was divided among the five children, although Orwell continued to farm it as a hobby. In 1966, a daughter, Mardi Gething, settled in the house with her husband. After the Board of Works designated the property as part of a reserve for a possible reservoir, the Gepp family sold all except the minimum 20 acres to the Board in the 1970s.⁶

DESCRIPTION:House

Style early Victorian with mid 20th century and later alterations and additions.

Design evolved - later changes have substantially altered the building and the exact original design in terms of say where was the original front door cannot be determined in the building.

Plan rectangular.

Single storeyed.

Walls timber stud, weatherboard clad.

Roofs gabled without eaves, corrugated iron clad.

Floors concrete slab to the oldest section, timber elsewhere.

Features are the built in stages external appearance, the coved ceilings to most of the roofs, original fireplace with built in bread oven, the surviving twelve pane window, entry (west) and rear (east) elevations, the mature Canary Island Palm tree, in-ground rainwater tank near the house, mature exotic site planting, originally shingle-roofed shed near the house and the log section framed shearing shed with its in-ground tank.

Garden Hill and Shearing Shed, Eltham-Yarra Glen Road Cont.



Garden Hill and Shearing Shed, Eltham-Yarra Glen Road Cont.

Canary Island Palm tree

This tree is about 8 - 10 Metres in height and in very good condition.

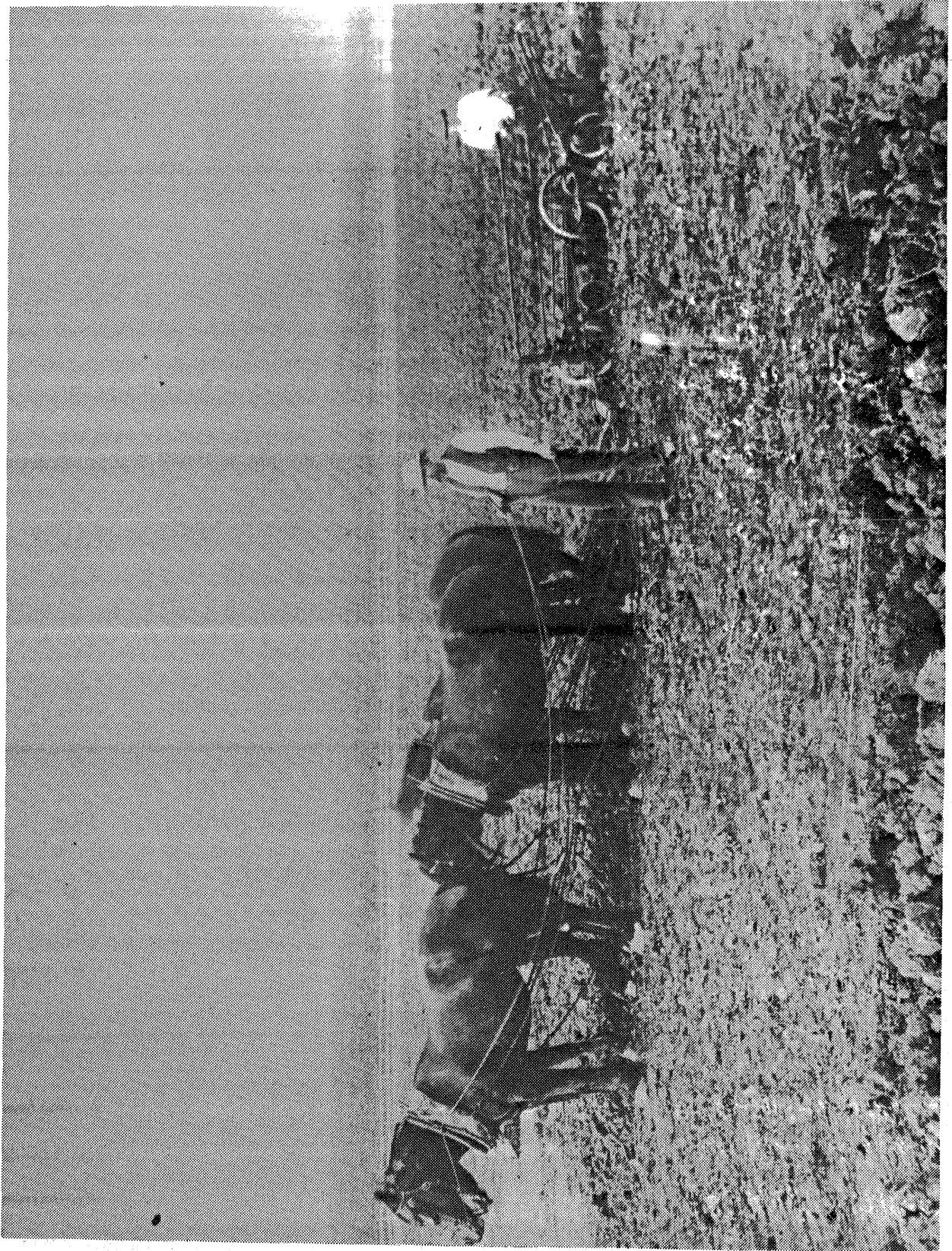
SOURCES:

1. Eltham Road District records 1858 No.101.
2. Eltham Shire RB 1923-24 North Riding No.976.
3. Marguerite Marshall, Eltham Shire, pp.12-13.
4. Eltham Shire RB 1922-23 No.966.
5. Ibid. 1893 No.225.
6. Marguerite Marshall, pp.8-9.
7. Eltham Shire RB 1904-5 No.944.
8. Ibid. 1907 No.967.
9. Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol.8, pp.640-642.
10. Book on Liberal Senator Missen in preparation.
11. Old photographs in ELHPC, nos. 420 and 421 - copies attached.

CONSERVATION GUIDELINES:

Keep all these buildings intact.
Regular maintenance as necessary.
Ensure all roof and ground-water is collected and carried well away from the buildings.
When repainting use original/period/appropriate paint colours and finishes.
Over time it would be desirable to see the house returned to say its circa 1900 form where feasible.
The shearing shed, owned by Melbourne Water, needs urgent repair work to ensure its survival in sound condition.





*JAMES AND ROBERT NESS PLOUGHING AT GARDEN HILL
(ELHPC NO. 420)*