

H0227

*Eltham watering place reserve*

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**NAME:** Eltham watering place reserve

**TYPE:** landscape

**SITE NUMBER:** 280

**ADDRESS** MAIN ROAD

ELTHAM

**MELWAY MAP:** 21 J8

**DATE:** 1850s-



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**PLANNING SCHEME OVERLAY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Planning scheme protection Recommended

External paint controls

Tree control

Outbuilding control

Internal alteration control

**HERITAGE VALUE** Shire

**ELTHAM STUDY CRITERIA:**

THEME(S), HISTORY, LANDSCAPE, STREETSCAPE

**ELTHAM STUDY THEMES:**

ELTHAM ARTISTS, REMNANT NATIVE VEGETATION

**HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS:**

Charles Symons Wingrove, Alistair Knox, Walter Withers

**REVISED ELTHAM STUDY EXTENT OF DESIGNATION:**

RESERVE AND INDIGENOUS PLANTING

**ELTHAM STUDY HISTORY:**

None

**REVISED HISTORY:**

An 1856 plan of this area describes it as 'rich land, flat'. Ten years later a deputation

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led by Watkins MLA sought that the land to be put aside as a temporary reserve for a watering place to be used by the 'inhabitants of Eltham'. April 1866 it was reserved from sale by the government and in 1880 the Shire of Eltham successfully urged that the land be placed under their control as a committee of management.

During WW1 the Lands Department requested that the reserve be used for cultivation by return soldiers but the Shire pointed out that it was used as a holiday resort and recreation area and as the reserve was partial to flooding it was not really suitable for agriculture. To ensure the fate of the ground the Shire requested a permanent reserve for recreation in 1922 when other metropolitan shires were also trying to increase their parkland areas. The Shire was also worried about the actions of timber getters in the reserve.

Robert Poole (Surveyor General's Office) inspected the reserve in 1925 and noted that the area was 'very picturesque' and located by the Diamond Creek on one of the 'picnic and tourist highways within easy reach of Melbourne'. Consequently it was used frequently by the travelling public for their leisure as a picnic resort. The original gum forest was still evident, providing shade for picnic parties and the flat areas were well used for cricket and other sport. Its title as water reserve seemed misplaced- all that was needed was a posting of regulations which deterred vandalism and protected the native forest. He did note that two tennis courts were erected in the road reserve adjoining the eastern boundary of the park and that the Council should be informed of this. The State Rivers & Water Supply Commission agreed with this view and the reserve was replaced with one for public recreation, gazetted 2 February 1927, with the Shire as a committee of management. The Shire produced regulations for the reserve in 1931. The Shire named the park in 1966 after Charles Symons Wingrove, secretary and engineer of the Eltham District Road Board and then the Shire, 1858-1904. His house (Wingrove Cottage) is at 672-674 Main Road and is thought to date from 1858.

Alistair Knox, as president of the Natural Development Association, approached the Crown Lands Department in the 1980s about the conditions at the park, a place in their view of national environmental significance. Knox claimed that it part of the park's history was its previous roles as an Aboriginal reserve and a drovers or diggers' overnight camping spot (one day out of Melbourne). It was being misused by the public resulting in denuding and harming the park's valuable vegetation and the weeds were rampant in the form of watsonia, onion weed, and blackberry. Trees had been cut down and others served as a base for camp fires, despite official warnings. In reply the Department noted his concern and stated the view of their officers on the health of the park: the manna gum canopy at 30m plus was very tall and the trees were thus over-mature (senescent). Huge limbs had broken away from the trees showing signs of their great age; the regrowth was also showing die back which might be attributable to increased surface runoff from compaction of the ground and consequent raising of the water table; contaminated ground water from increasing residential development adjoining; possible infection by the cinnamon fungus; infestation of the sub-canopy of silver wattles with exotics like hawthorn and willow; and weeds spreading in the shrub layer and ground cover. Added to all of this was the Shire's desire to realign the main road and take a quarter hectare of the reserve: no redevelopment of the park could take place until this was achieved.

Knox replied informing the Department of another facet of the park's significance. It had a major influence of the artistic life of Australia via the Heidelberg School of painters who used the Eltham valley and Wingrove Park in particular for their subject matter. Walter Withers had resided and painted nearby from 1904 until his death. 'Some of his most famous canvases were of Wingrove park and associated areas'. Jock Frater and Max Meldrum had also used the area. Knox claimed that the park 'became recognized as the nexus of the art movement of Eltham which was the true extension of the Heidelberg

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school. It is impossible to estimate how many significant paintings have been done in and around the area between 1900 and the present time'. Only certain parts of the Heidelberg Yarra Valley had equal footing with this place as far as the development of the school was concerned: the manna gums formed a major part of their painted views.

Walter Withers' house at 250 Bolton St (former Ross St, later Ryans Rd), located to the north west of the park, was recorded as Walter Withers, owner-occupier of Southernwood, a house and 2.1/2 acres in Ross St Lower, Little Eltham from 1904 onwards. Walter's (and later Fanny's) other address was noted as Oxford Chambers, Bourke St, Melbourne c1908-11. From 1910 Fanny Withers (artist) was the rated owner-occupier and remained so into the 1930s. Walter died in 1914.

A panel at the park, part of the Heidelberg School Artists Trail, depicts 'The Silent Gums' 1909 (Felton Bequest) stating that it was painted in the vicinity of the park of Withers' neighbour, Tom Orr's cattle grazing under manna gums. Orr's property at that time was some distance to the west on lots 9-14/3 (Nillumbik parish plan) being 63 acres in West Eltham part of the Greensborough Railway Station estate (late Montmorency estate). From c1913 he also had a house and 4.1/2 acres in Peel St, Eltham, close by to the north of Withers. Neither of these locations is at or near Wingrove Park.

#### **ELTHAM STUDY DESCRIPTON:**

Wingrove Park is an informal park set on the edge of Diamond Creek and features a meandering pathway which runs through a landscape of indigenous trees and some groups of Prunus species at the northern end. Many of the trees are very large Manna Gums in excellent condition. Other trees have been planted quite recently. Apart from the immediate creek edge where understorey shrubs exist, areas between the trees are grass which is slashed regularly. The park has a natural quality and has a simple character typical of Eltham.

#### **REVISED OR EXTENDED DESCRIPTON:**

The park contains exotic grasses and weeds, as well as the manna gums and wattles. Car parking areas and pathways are further man made intrusions into any perceived natural character. Some revegetation is evident.

**Condition:** Good (partially disturbed, well preserved)

**Integrity** Externally substantially intact/some intrusions- car parks, man made objects.

#### **ELTHAM STUDY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

Wingrove Park is primarily significant for its historical value as a place where travellers would stop and camp overnight. It was formerly known as Bremner's Reserve and Gazetted a water reserve. It was also a place where artists would come and paint. Max Meldrum, for instance, rented a house opposite the park in 1921 and loved to paint the surrounding area, which was shown in an early 1920s exhibition. Nowadays the park retains some fine examples of remnant native trees along Diamond Creek, particularly Manna Gums 'Eucalyptus viminalis', which merit individual protection; some of the Manna Gums have scars of aboriginal origin.

#### **REVISED STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (with AHC criteria)**

The Eltham watering place reserve, later Wingrove Park, is significant to Nillumbik Shire:

- for its representation of indigenous landscape in the area, particularly the manna gums, and hence the early history of settlement in the area and its use as a watering place for stock (Criterion A4);
- for its long-held association with the nationally prominent Heidelberg School of

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painters (Criterion G1);

- for its memory to a long-term public servant within the Shire, Wingrove; and
- as the documented focus of environmental action by the noted environmental designer, Alistair Knox, and the local Natural Development Association in the 1980s, highlighting a continuing community concern for indigenous landscape (Criterion A4, H1).

**ELTHAM STUDY REFERENCES:**

None

**FURTHER REFERENCES:**

Land Victoria- reserve file;  
Municipal Rate Books

**QUERIES RESOLVED:**

History, sources?