

GARDEN HILL

425 ELTHAM-YARRA GLEN ROAD, KANGAROO GROUND.

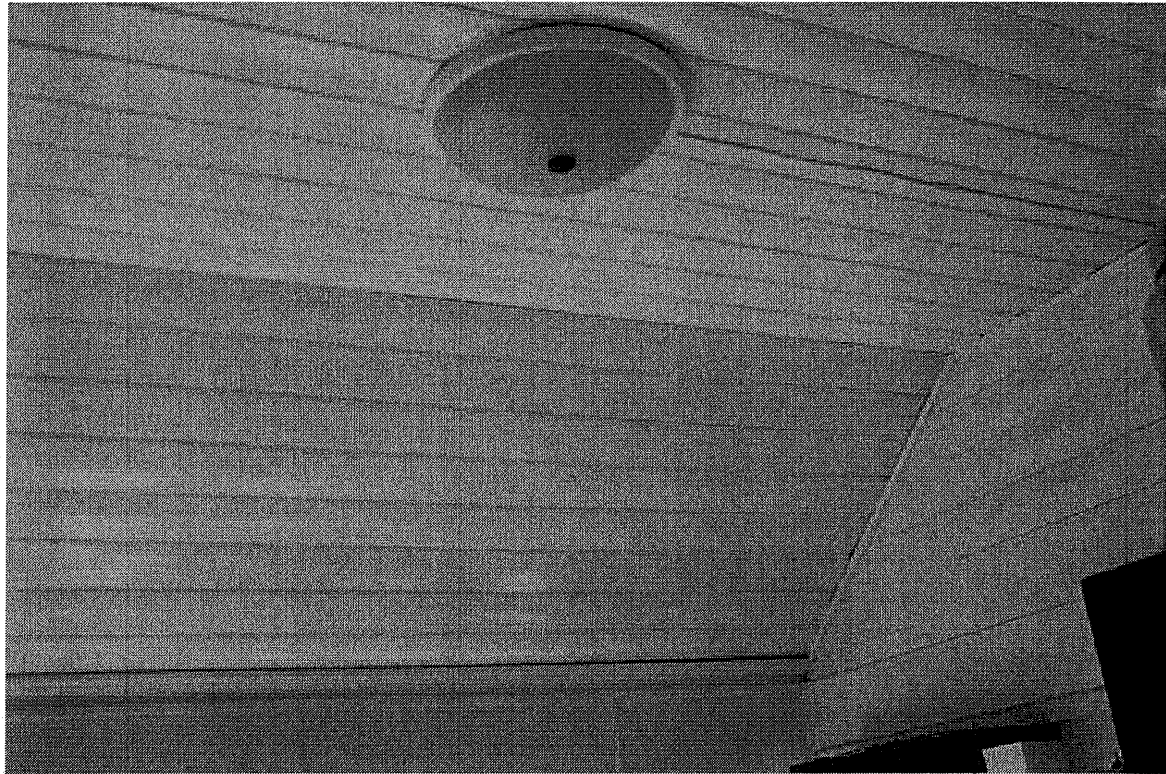


Figure 1 early chamfered ceilings under gabled wings

ELTHAM STUDY DATE: 1850S?-

(EARLIEST PART OF PRESENT TIMBER BUILDINGS)¹

? NORTH SIDE ADDED

19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES VARIOUS ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS (1940 FIREPLACE ALTERED)

1960S BRICK HOUSE ADDED

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

ELTHAM STUDY THEME(S)/CRITERIA: EARLY SETTLEMENT, PROMINENT RESIDENTS (ANDREW HARKNESS, SIR HERBERT WILLIAM GEPP), FARMING, HISTORY, RARITY, ARCHITECTURE, HORTICULTURE

ELTHAM STUDY 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

ELTHAM STUDY 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 descendants 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 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.

Proposed revised Statement of Significance 2000

This timber house, underground tank, Canary Island palm and former dairy are significant historically and architecturally to the Nillumbik Shire because:

- Of the early date (1850s, 1870s) of its oldest sections (house, dairy);
- the long period of occupation as a home by a prominent local pioneer, Andrew Harkness;
- the long period of occupation as a weekender by an industrialist of Statewide prominence, Sir Henry Gepp;
- for the expression by the interior (gabled wings) of the modest accommodation used by the Shire's pioneering settlers, particularly the large combined fireplace and bread oven in the main room, and the chamfered ceilings in most rooms; and
- the Canary Island palm ('*Phoenix canariensis*') which has family historic significance and is a large example in a Shire-wide context.

ELTHAM STUDY HISTORY:

Original Use: Farm house¹

Later Use: Hobby Farm

Original Owner: Andrew Harkness, farmer¹

Later Owners: Alexander White, farmer⁵, Sir Herbert William Gepp²

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.

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

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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

ELTHAM STUDY 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.

Canary Island Palm tree

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

ELTHAM STUDY 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.

Inspection 2000

(with Mr. & Mrs. Richard Gething and their daughter Mary Jane Gething)

The above property was inspected with the owners who provided historical information about the property.

The interior of the main house (gabled wings) was confirmed as a number of early rooms with chamfered ceilings clad with a fine bead edge lining board. These rooms indicate the early stages of construction for the Harkness family, being the early 1850s (1852?) and the 1870s (1874?). Other wings have been added this century by descendants of Herbert Gepp and the walls of some rooms reclad with strapped ply sheet in the 1920s when owned by Gepp himself. Since, the Gethings have added two skillion rooms on the north west corner of the old section and replaced windows along the north side with sliding doors etc.

Nearby on the south is a gabled dairy with shingled roof, stone and brick floor and a dome-top underground tank, which holds rain water from the house roof. A Canary Island palm is nearby, being typical of the 1920s-30s but according to the Gepp descendants, is earlier than that.

Between the road and the house complex is a bungalow apparently built there by Gepp for his caretaker in the 1930s.

The barn could not be inspected as it was on another property (owned by Bill Spilliopoulos 94344333)- he should be notified of the amendment.

The current owners (Mr. Richard Gething & Mrs. Margaret Gething, Gepp's daughter who have occupied the house since the mid 1960s) quote a woman (nee White) of 80-85 years who visited them at the house, stating that she was born there and that her mother was born there in 1852. She said that the Harkness family consisted of three sons and a daughter who married a White (Alex). White inherited the farm.

The current living room of the house (with altered chimney and baker's oven) was the kitchen-living part of the house with two small sleeping areas elsewhere and the present parlour (next room west from the main room under the same gable). The current owners remember a black iron stove in the current fireplace. The second line of two (once 3) gabled rooms on the north was built about 20 years later (c1872) as bedrooms.

Of the Gepp occupation Mrs. Gething made it clear that the house was used only as a weekender and was never a permanent residence. Her mother had always hated coming there but her father had loved it. Mrs. Gething had accompanied them as a child, marvelling at the rough living (kerosene tin, open fire cooking, horse writing). Gepp was a gentleman farmer. He died at the house after arriving there for a stay with his driver (1954).

The house Strathallan, Greensborough Rd, Macleod was the Gepp city house (1920-36), a large Edwardian-era villa built 1907 for the Le Grand family. This house has been converted for use as an aged care facility. The family later lived in Cliveden Mansions (now Hilton Hotel site) after Gepp had subdivided Strathallan.

The White daughter (Mrs. Cameron) said that she gave the Canary Island palm as a gift for her parents (although the date of the gift suggested she was 5 or 6) about 100 years ago. Mr. Gething believes that Sir Herbert would not have planted the palm.

Conclusion

The house, palm, tank and former dairy are of heritage significance and should remain in the planning scheme, as qualified by an incorporated plan providing for permit exemptions (and replacing the recommended extent above). The owners wish to have official assurances that a second house could be built on the house block, subject to a

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permit, if needed in the future (as Prohibited Use is ticked in the PS column). Without a survey it is impossible to comment on the present mapped extent.

Query	Response
<i>Is the site is of heritage significance?</i>	Yes
<i>Alterations and additions since studies carried out?</i>	No
<i>Any further property details</i>	See above
<i>Coverage of the heritage overlay?</i>	House exterior and interior of gabled wings, former dairy out-building interior and exterior, Canary Island palm and in-ground water tank near house entry, with emphasis on original fabric from pre 1954 and existing public views to the complex from the Eltham Yarra Glen Road also land within the present title ¹ with emphasis on the land between the above building-tree group and the Eltham Yarra Glen Road and land within nominally 5m of the perimeter of the group (shearing shed with in-ground water tank not assessed).

¹ Survey needed to be more specific