

Heritage Overlay No: 013
Citation No.: 002
Place: Lynuilg Homestead, 477-569
Bensons Road

Other Names of Place: N/A
Location: 477 - 569 Benson Road, Toolern Vale
Critical Dates: Present house built c.1916.
Existing Heritage Listings: None
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

Lynuilg Homestead, 477-569 Benson Road, Toolern Vale, c.1916, is significant as a moderately intact late nineteenth and early twentieth century farm complex in a rural, landscaped setting. The homestead includes a retrospective Late Victorian styled main house, gabled underground tank, water tank and timber stand, rear hipped timber outbuilding, rare surviving draughthorse stabling and altered shearing shed. The mature Canary Island palms and other exotic trees and plantings contribute to the landscaped setting. Lynuilg is in a rich farming area, which may originally have been used for grape growing. It represents one of very few surviving early twentieth century farm complexes in the Melton Shire featuring a small

collection of intact farm buildings. The main house also represents one of a small number of surviving Late Victorian styled timber homestead dwellings.

Lynuulg homestead, at 477-569 Benson Road, is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC D.2). Although altered and extended, the main house still demonstrates some original design qualities of a retrospective Late Victorian style. These qualities include the long hipped roof form and the encircling verandah. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the single storey height, horizontal timber weatherboard wall cladding, corrugated sheet metal roof cladding, face brick chimneys with multi-corbelled tops, narrow eaves, and the timber framed double hung windows. The gable roof form and construction of the nearby underground tank, hipped roof form and construction of the rear outbuilding, gable form and construction of the rare surviving draughthorse stabling, water tank and timber log stand, remnant milking/shearing shed structure and the landscaped setting (mature Canary date palms, main house garden and nearby conifers) also contribute to the aesthetic and architectural significance of the place.

Lynuulg homestead at 477-569 Benson Road, is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4, B2, H1). It is associated with the old, well-known, and locally prominent Kitson, Cameron and Hunt families. In particular, the property has associations with Samuel Kitson, the first farmer to introduce back delivery reaping machines in the neighbourhood and a first-prize winner for wheat in the exhibition at Crystal Palace, London, in the 1850s. It is rich farming land, and may originally have been associated with grape growing, and it is the only place remaining in the Shire associated with the ‘Novel Industry’ provisions of the 1862 Land Act, used for wine grape growing in this area. The underground tank with gabled roof is a good illustration of a form of nineteenth and early twentieth century water storage technology in the Shire.

Overall, Lynuulg homestead at 477-569 Benson Road is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

Lynuulg Homestead, 477-569 Benson Road, Toolern Vale, has a rural setting on the rise of the hill. It consists of the main timber house with a house garden setting to one side and a complex of outbuildings and structures set further up the sloping ground.

The garden is especially characterised by the two Canary date palm trees (*Phoenix canariensis*) at the front and the open grassed and perimeter shrubbery, including an Illawarra flame tree (*Brachychiton acerifolius*) and two large red flowering trees on left hand side (possibly South African). Shelter belt planting includes a row of mature Cypress trees, a pine (*Pinus radiata*)

The single storey, horizontal timber weatherboard, retrospective Late Victorian styled main house is characterised by a long hipped roof form and an encircling verandah. These roof forms are clad in galvanised corrugated steel. Two early face brick chimneys with multi-corbelled tops, typical of Federation era design, adorn the roofline. Narrow overhangs are features of the eaves. Another early feature of the design are the timber framed double hung windows.

The main house has experienced some alterations and additions. The verandah has been enclosed at two ends, forming two rooms with external horizontal timber weatherboard wall cladding and timber framed four paned windows. The square timber verandah posts have been introduced (replacing earlier posts) and the house and verandah have recent roof cladding (including laser light cladding).

Immediately behind the main house is a large underground tank, presumably without a domed cover. It has a gabled roof clad in galvanised corrugated steel and horizontal timber weatherboard gable infill. The corrugated steel roof has been replaced quite recently. A small vertical timber boarded door is situated at one end.

Beside the underground tank is an early round galvanised corrugated steel header tank on a timber log stand. The owner advises that this was demolished in 2003.

A small distance from the house is a modestly scaled Victorian vernacular styled outbuilding. It has a hipped roof clad in galvanised corrugated steel, horizontal timber weatherboard wall cladding and timber framed multi-paned windows. This outbuilding is in poor condition with substantial deterioration to the wall cladding.

A particular feature of the homestead is the former draughthorse stables. A rare surviving example of this type of stabling, the Victorian vernacular styled building has a simple gable roof form clad in lapped galvanised corrugated steel and horizontal timber weatherboard wall cladding in very poor condition. There are two bays of stables identified in the vertical timber doors with early hinges and the diagonal timber ventilators above. Another bay is denoted by the single vertical timber boarded door. Double timber doors are located at the side.

A further distance away is the former milking shed that was subsequently converted into a shearing shed. It has a skillion roof form with galvanised corrugated steel roof and wall cladding with timber stud frame and a collapsed stone base to one side. At one end of the structure is an elevated simple gable structure.

History:

The property originally consisted of three Crown allotments in the Parish of Yangardook: allotment 19P, of 100 acres, granted to S Kitson on 11th November 1862; allotment 19K, of 30 acres, granted to S Kitson on 7th February 1872; and allotment 19J, of 33.1.0 acres, granted to S Kitson on 2nd February 1864.

Anders Hjorth, in his recollections of Melton in 1861-67 provides an interesting insight into Samuel Kitson, the first owner of this property, and the times:-

‘Mr Kitson, a farmer lived near Toolern. He had been a ship’s captain and had a fine farm, and was progressive; he took first prize for wheat at the exhibition, Crystal Palace, London.

He was the first to introduce back delivery reaping machines in the neighbourhood; but men, looking for harvest work, gave him a lot of trouble by placing at night pieces of wire in the crop, where he would be cutting the following day.

The machine itself was a great lumbering affair, could be seen miles off. The neighbours called it the ‘Great Eastern’.

Mr Kitson would stand no nonsense from his men. I was staying at his place once, binding straw. One evening he came from Melbourne, bringing back two men to work for him. The following morning, at 10 o’clock, the two men had not yet got out of their bunks, when Mr Kitson appeared, calling out ‘Get up men. You have a long road before you’. He then turned around, and without any more ado, packed them off, there and then!’¹

¹ Anders Hjorth, ‘Recollections of Melton 1861-67’, in Melton & District Historical Society Newsletter, February 2001.

Samuel Kitson's earlier and principal farm, and homestead, was not the Lynuilg nor the Mount Ida property, but a property south of Toolern Vale, between the Melton-Gisborne Road and Toolern Creek. The earliest ratebooks indicate that it consisted of 472 acres, being Sections 36-38, Parish of Yangardook. The Ferris family owned this property by the early twentieth century.² It was situated on a knoll beside the creek, but today consists of substantial ruins, including a bluestone coolroom, many large old exotic trees, and the remnants of a later era of farming (Melton Heritage Study Site No.28).

Kitson was in possession of the 163 acre Lynuilg site by the time of the 1872 rate record. It must have been very good land, because in 1882 its 163 acres were valued at £65, whereas his proven 472 acre main farm, which had produce award winning wheat, and which possessed the homestead and improvements, was valued at only £124.³

Local historical memory associates the early Lynuilg property, and others around it in the Black Hill area, with grape growing. A simple, and now filled-in unlined earth cellar said to be associated with this use, remains on the original property beside the road. Local tradition (correctly) recounts that a disease devastated the grape industry. There have been no grapes grown in the area since the 1930s.⁴

No documentary evidence has yet been found to shed light on the former grape-growing industry in the area. Although at the same time much land in the Parish of Holden (on Vineyard Road, and Jacksons Creek Sunbury) had been alienated under the 'Novel Industry' provisions of the 1862 Land Act, principally for wine grape growing in this area, the current Yangardook Parish Plans contain no evidence of any similar alienation in the Bensons Road area.⁵ However land behind Kitson was alienated under the more unusual Section 31 provision of the Land Act 1869. This provision was a conversion of a provision under the earlier 1865 Land Act, which provided a licence to reside on or cultivate small allotments on (or adjacent to) goldfields.⁶ Small finds of gold, and exploration, was occurring at the time in the forests west of this area, towards the Djerriwarrh Creek.

The Lynuilg property remained in Samuel Kitson's ownership, without any record of buildings, and at the same valuation until 1887. The ratebooks for the next year, 1888 record that the property had changed ownership, and was now owned by 'Robert Kitson, farmer, Toolern'. It was described as a 'house and 163 acres'. The property valuation also increased to £75 from the £65 it had been for years.⁷ A new house had evidently been built and Robert (probably Kitson's son), had taken up residence.

The 1887 house was apparently greatly modified, or replaced at a later date. Present owner Ian Hunt advises that the Lynuilg Homestead was built in 1916 by the Cameron family. J Cameron had been original Crown grantees of several neighbouring properties (Allotments 1A & 2A of Section 20).⁸ By 1914 Wilson Cameron (416 Bourke Street Melbourne) owned the original 163 acre Kitson property plus Allotment 19L (originally granted to D Hogg), situated between this and an original J Cameron's property of 40 acres. The ratebooks record 'buildings' on both of these properties at the time, although by 1917 the 'building' on the 40 acre allotment

² Shire of Melton Ratebooks, 1872, 1882.

³ Shire of Melton Ratebook, 1882

⁴ Ian Hunt, personal conversation, 6/3/2002

⁵ However, the notation 562/21 might eventually provide further information.

⁶ Cabena, P, McRae, H, Bladin, E, *The Lands Manual: A Finding Guide to Victorian Land Records 1836-1983* (Royal Historical Society of Victoria, 1989), p.85

⁷ Shire of Melton Ratebooks, 1886-87, 1887-88.

⁸ Parish Plan, Parish of Yangardook.

had ‘disappeared’. The owner advises that the 1887 dwelling was pulled down with the materials used to build the dairy at Lynuig.⁹ The property values shown in the ratebooks don’t change, and it is impossible to deduce from the ratebooks what was happening on the property at this time.¹⁰ One possibility is a c.1917 major upgrade or replacement of the original Kitson house, and demolition of earlier buildings (or their removal to this newly renovated/built/consolidated homestead, perhaps as outbuildings). The owner advises that this occurred in 1916.

Family tradition has it that the grandfather of the present owner purchased the property c.1918.¹¹ Ratebooks record that John and Sarah Ann Hunt, purchased ‘203 acres and buildings’ between 1921 and 1924.¹² By this time the property included an additional 40 acre property between two of the original grants. Ian Hunt has lived at Lynuilg since 1937.

In confirmation of the early high rate valuation on the land, Ian Hunt advises that the immediate vicinity has ‘beautiful soil’, and better rainfall than Melton. The timber stables on the property were for the draught-horses used for farm work. The original milking shed was converted to a shearing shed in the mid 1970s (reflecting the demise of the dairy industry in Melbourne’s near west around that time).

History of Underground Tanks

Underground tanks were a typical component of nineteenth century rural properties in Victoria, and illustrate a form of water collection and infrastructure no longer practised.

Provision of a domestic water supply was critical to the establishment of any rural property that was not beside a permanent supply of water. ‘The first essential was to secure a reliable water supply. Unless the farm bordered a permanent creek ... the selector had to dig a dam for his animals and a well [sic] for the household supply.’¹³ Especially in low-rainfall Melton, domestic water storage was critical, and relics of these systems is a key part of the heritage of the Shire. Many underground domestic ‘wells’ (as they are usually called) around Melton are in fact ‘tanks’ which, rather than tapping groundwater, were sealed cisterns for the storage of water from the roofs of buildings.

Underground tanks became only generally necessary in Australia from the 1850s, when increased population and Crown land sales ensured that many dwellings were unable to locate beside a stream. At the same time, as a result of the goldrushes, the mass introduction into Australia of the new product ‘corrugated iron’ made it feasible for ordinary people to be able to channel water into the underground tanks from roofs and guttering.¹⁴ Underground tanks on small properties generally seem to have been located at the rear of the house; this might have enabled the roof runoff from dairy and other nearby farm outbuildings to also feed the tank.

The construction of wells goes back thousands of years, and designs for underground wells and tanks, such as contained in JC Loudon’s *Encyclopaedia of Agriculture*, had been available to

⁹ Stewart Hunt, personal conversation, 18/12/06.

¹⁰ Shire of Melton Ratebooks, 1914 - 1918.

¹¹ Ian Hunt, personal conversation, 6/3/2002.

¹² Shire of Melton Ratebooks, 1921-1925.

¹³ Cannon, Michael, *Life in the Country: Australia in the Victorian Age: 2* (Nelson, West Melbourne, 1978), p.149

¹⁴ Hughes, Trueman, Ludlow, ‘Wells and Underground Tanks’, prepared for the Heritage Council of NSW (nd), *passim*; Cannon, *op cit*, p.150

English farmers since at least the early nineteenth century.¹⁵ These generally advocated cigar shaped cross-sections, with the domed top being mostly underground. This shape was also used in Australia, but on Melton rural properties they do not appear to have been used on early farms. Instead, the early tanks had vertical walls, and no domed covers. Most appear to have been constructed of local stone rather than brick, and without a low wall (as in romantic images of European wells) to ensure safety. Isolation and cost probably meant that they may have been sunk by the property-owners, at least in the case of early small farms. Examples of such tanks on small farms are the former Scarborough and Moloney properties on Mount Cottrell Road (Place Nos.293 and 292) which were constructed of bluestone in the 1850s and 1871, and for which no evidence of a cover remains. In terms of larger early (1850s) properties, *Glen Elgin* (Place No.39) has a low timber-framed gabled roof, clad in corrugated iron; and the tanks of *Tibbermore* (Place No.392), *Lynuilg* (Place No.002) and the *Diggers Rest Hotel* (Place No.067) both have flat corrugated iron covers on raised stone sides. (These covers, and sides, might have been added later, as gradual modernisation of the tanks was common.)

While domes were advocated in early British architectural literature, they appears to have only begun to be built in Australia in the 1860s. At that time there was a growing realisation of the dangers of uncovered wells and tanks in terms of sanitation, as well as safety. Unclean water could wash into uncovered tanks from dairies, and sometimes from cesspits, and vermin also obtained easy access:-

‘The typical countrywoman of the early days hardly moved a step from her threshold “to cast away indescribable filth”. The contents of chamber pots, vegetable peelings, grease-laden water – all festered around the hut and blended with the nearby latrine to create a “peculiarly offensive” odour which attracted swarms of flies. Sometimes the fluids soaked through the soil into the well [sic], so that the family suffered from an intermittent “low typhoid” fever whose cause they did not suspect.’¹⁶

In 1885 *Martins Home and Farm* described uncovered underground tanks and wells as ‘the family rat-trap’.¹⁷ ‘Common infections of the nineteenth century, such as typhoid, scarlet fever, diphtheria (which was known to have proved tragically fatal in the case of Melton’s Kerr, Moloney and Wood families), tuberculosis and gastro-enteritis, spread rapidly in many country towns Efficient disposal of human excreta was a major problem.’¹⁸ The connection between water pollution and public health, in particular diseases like dysentery, typhoid and even cholera were beginning to be appreciated.¹⁹

At the same time, technology was contributing to better health. As long as a bucket was necessary to draw water, it was not possible to cover the tops of tanks, or at best only to provide a rudimentary cover. Once a small and reasonably priced pump became available there was no further need for an open tank. The availability of domestic hand-pumps grew in the 1850s, and by 1860 NSW public buildings (schools and railway stations) specified domes as the standard form of construction for tanks.²⁰ It is also highly likely that the increasing access to good quality bricks, professional bricklaying skills, and cement, over the course of the late nineteenth century contributed to the proliferation of covered tanks in places like Melton.

¹⁵ J.C. Loudon, *Encyclopaedia of Agriculture*, Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman, London, 1826.

¹⁶ Cannon, *op cit*, p.151

¹⁷ Cited in Hughes *et al*, *op cit*, p.19.

¹⁸ Cannon, *op cit*, pp.255-6

¹⁹ Hughes *et al*, *op cit*, pp.19-24

²⁰ *ibid*, pp.32-33

The new tanks were still circular in plan, but constructed of brick, with approximately 9 inches of clay puddle behind the brick wall to keep the tank water-tight. The hemispherical dome, or segment of a dome, was also constructed with bricks. Both the interior of the tank, and the exterior of the dome, were cement rendered according to recommended practice.²¹ Without internal inspection it is not known whether the cross-section of the tanks typically remained vertical, or cigar-shaped, which were both described in textbooks. Numerous domes in Melton appear to be segmental spheres, rather than hemispheres, and may have spread underneath the surface to a wider diameter tank cylinder, as per the textbooks. The domes were provided with a manhole on top (covered with a concrete cover), of minimum width 16 inches, to provide access for cleaning. Mr Jeff Robinson of Melton West recalls entering the tank on the family farm to repair internal render.²² The opening also enabled the cool water to be used for refrigeration: perishables and jellies (for setting) were lowered into the water in a bucket.²³

The only known Australian heritage study of underground tanks (conducted in NSW), claims that they were only superseded by the familiar corrugated iron tanks (on tankstands to provide water pressure) in the 1890s, when ‘the galvanised above-ground tank was in widespread use.’²⁴ In Victoria however Miles Lewis claims that ‘the corrugated iron rainwater tank was manufactured in Melbourne by the later 1850s, and spread very rapidly despite claims that the zinc coating would poison the water.’²⁵ Anders Hjorth’s recollections of Melton in the 1860s state that: ‘The water supply was very deficient; a few had iron tanks, and some under-ground ones.’²⁶ He may however have been referring to the square plate-metal ‘ships tanks’ (shipping containers, usually for foodstuffs, that were designed in Britain for recycling in this manner) that are most usually found these days on larger properties, rather than the larger corrugated steel version that became more common. A survey of remaining underground tanks on nineteenth century Melton properties might reveal the extent to which galvanised iron (or steel) header tanks were used as an alternative. We know that underground tanks continued to be built in the early twentieth century, and that today there are many properties that have both underground tanks (most not in use) and corrugated steel header tanks. As access to hand, petroleum or electric pumps permitted, they may have been used in conjunction.

While domes probably became widespread from the 1860s for domestic use, it cannot be categorically inferred that the absence of a dome means that the tank was built before that time. On the other hand, the presence of a dome does not necessarily mean that the tank was built after this time, as apparently the building of a dome over a tank often took place many years after the original construction.²⁷ The best assumption that can be made in terms of dating tanks is that, water being essential to habitation, they were built at or very soon after the construction of the original dwelling on a site.

So in the case of this property, it is very likely that the tank was built c.1887. Tom Collins, a well know tank builder, and his father built the underground tank at Lynuilg.²⁸ The presumably

²¹ Eg, Albrecht, CE, *Measurements and Dimensions of Tanks and Dams* (Melbourne, Arnell and Jackson [1885?]), pp.30-33

²² Mr Jeff Robinson, personal conversation, 14/2/2006. This contradicts the Hughes *et al* survey of tanks in NSW, which found that internal render was rare in domestic tanks (pp.55-56).

²³ Hughes *et al*, *op cit*, pp.32-80.

²⁴ Hughes *et al*, *op cit*. (Austral Archaeology also conducted a study of early Chinese wells on the Koorong, South Australia.)

²⁵ Lewis, Miles, *Physical Investigation of a Building: National Trust Technical Bulletin 9.1* (National Trust of Australia, Victoria, 1989).

²⁶ Hjorth, Anders, ‘Recollections of Melton 1861-67’, in M&DHS Newsletter, February 2001.

²⁷ Hughes *et al*, *op cit*, p.3

²⁸ Stewart Hunt, personal conversation, 18/12/06.

open tank, covered by a timber-framed clad in corrugated galvanised steel is consistent with this assumption.

Tankbuilders known to have operated in Melton Shire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries include WA Cecil, Tom Collins (c.1890-1913), and Augustus Schebler ('known for his workmanship' according to Collins).²⁹

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Shire of Melton Historical Themes: 'Farming'

Comparable Places in Shire of Melton:

The main dwelling at Lynuilg Homestead represents one of few surviving timber Late Victorian styled rural houses in the Melton Shire. Other comparable examples of this type include:

- House, 117-125 McPherson Road, Toolern Vale (Place Id. 048): this house shares a similar hipped roof form and encircling verandah, with timber framed double hung windows and a central timber framed doorway with sidelights and highlights. There is a gabled addition at the rear and the verandah appears to have been altered. Overall, the design, character, appearance and integrity of this house appears to be similar to Lynuilg homestead.
- Glengallon, Greigs Road, Mt. Cottrell (Place Id. 282) This dwelling has the familiar hipped roof form, encircling verandah, construction and appearance as Lynuilg Homestead. There are also timber framed double hung windows, although the front façade features tripartite windows flanking the main timber framed doorway. The lattice verandah valance appears to have been introduced. There is a gabled addition at the rear.
- Mt Kororoit Homestead, Mt Kororoit Road, Plumpton (Place Id. 146). This dwelling is similar in form, scale, construction and appearance as Lynuilg homestead, although the verandah may have been introduced and has a higher springing height.

Other very early twentieth century homestead complexes in the Melton Shire considered to have cultural heritage significance include:

- Mt Kororoit Homestead, Mt Kororoit Road, Plumpton (Place Id. 146). This homestead complex appears to have a comparable number of buildings as Mt Idea Homestead and features a grouping of Victorian styled timber buildings comprising the main house with detached kitchen/cottage, small outbuilding, stables, dairy and shearing shed. The homestead setting is enhanced by the layout and location of the buildings and yards, dry stone walls, peppercorn and palm trees and the quarry faced sheep holding yard beside the Kororoit Creek.
- Glengallon, Greigs Road, Mt. Cottrell (Place Id. 282). This property is not on the same scale as Lynuilg Homestead. There is a rear outbuilding that does contribute to the significance of the property, comprising a Federation vernacular styled 2-stand galvanised corrugated steel shearing shed having a simple gable roof.

²⁹ Robinson, *op cit*; also Tom Collins memoirs, part of which were reproduced in the M&DSH Newsletter of December 2000.

- Mt Cotterell Homestead, 167 Faulkners Road, Mt. Cottrell (Place Id. 360). This property is a moderately intact early twentieth century farm complex and has a smaller collection of farm buildings at Lynuilg Homestead. The main house does not have the design quality of the dwelling at Lynuilg, being an altered Victorian vernacular design. The other buildings include the galvanised corrugated steel machinery shed (featuring an elongated gambrel roof form), timber weatherboard stables (also featuring an elongated gambrel roof form), remnants of a former 14-stand shearing shed (in the partly collapsed concrete and pressed red brick sheep dip). The setting of the homestead is enhanced by the number of dry stone walls on the property.

Overall, Lynuilg Homestead represents one of very few surviving early twentieth century farm complexes in the Melton Shire featuring a small collection of intact farm buildings. The main house also represents one of a small number of surviving Late Victorian styled timber homestead dwellings.

Historically, the complex is also the only remaining house associated with the Novel Industry provisions of the 1862 Land Act, which was associated with wine grape growing in this area.

Condition:

Main House – Good
Rear outbuildings - Poor

Integrity:

Moderately intact – main house
Substantially intact – farm complex

Recommendations:

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

External Paint Controls:	<i>No</i>
Internal Alteration Controls:	<i>No</i>
Tree Controls:	<i>Yes – Canary Island Palms nearby main house</i>
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	<i>Yes – hipped outbuilding to the rear of main house, draughthorse stabling, gabled underground tank and milking/shearing shed.</i>

Other Recommendations:

- Given the perilous state of the timber outbuildings, it is recommended that a photographic analysis of these buildings be prepared.
- A Conservation Management Plan for the site is also desirable.



Underground water tank covered with gable roof, and adjacent corrugated steel header tank. The steel header tank was demolished in 2003.