

Heritage Overlay No.: 020
Citation No.: 019
Place: Former Condon's Dairy, 1397-1457
Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road

Other Names of Place: None
Location: 1397-1457 Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road, Toolern Vale
Critical Dates: Likely construction: c.1850s; partial repair: c.2000.
Existing Heritage Listings: None
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

The outbuilding at 1397-1457 Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road is significant as a moderately intact example of a rare surviving example of a Victorian vernacular random rubble farm outbuilding in the Melton Shire. It is also a relic of the early Irish farming enclave at Toolern Vale. The outbuilding at 1397-1457 Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC C2, D2). Although altered (with its repaired southern wall), the outbuilding still demonstrates original design qualities of a Victorian vernacular style. These qualities include the simple gable roof form clad in colourbond steel, and the random rubble wall construction with evidence of an early rendered finish. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the small window opening with timber lintel, single door opening and the

remnant low random rubble walling at the northern end providing evidence of a former building. The mature adjacent redgum also contributes to the significance of the place.

The outbuilding at 1397-1457 Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4, B2). It was associated with the Condon family from the mid nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, and for at least one hundred years, until the present day, the property has been known as 'Condon's Paddock'. The then-ruinous building was identified in the 1983 autobiography of Condon descendent Professor Vincent Buckley, who had been awarded a personal Chair by Melbourne University, and in whose posthumous honour the university instituted the Vincent Buckley Poetry Prize. The building is also a rare relic of the only significant Irish farming enclave to have established in the Shire. Although the Irish were the most numerous ethnic group in the early decades of the Shire's history, they were small in terms of land ownership, and this part of Toolern Vale was the only place with a concentration of Irish farmers sufficient to institute a Catholic school in the 1860s.

Overall, the outbuilding at 1397-1457 Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

The outbuilding at 1397-1457 Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road has a rural setting, being surrounded by plantings, a mature eucalyptus tree and some corrugated galvanised steel fencing. It is visible from the Coimadai - Diggers Rest Road, the major east-west road in the locality.

The single storey, random rubble, Victorian vernacular styled outbuilding is characterised by a simple gable roof form clad in colourbond steel. The walls appear to have been rendered at an early period, with the render now peeling away. The northern wall has been repaired as has the southern end. There are no eaves. A small window opening (with a timber lintel) is situated in the northern gable end, with a single doorway on the southern gable. The floor level is lower than the external ground level by 1000mm.

Attached to the northern end of the building is remnant low random rubble walling of a former building. The former owner advises that there were rubble 10 metres to the north of the outbuilding indicating a third room/building (possibly an outside kitchen to the mainhouse).¹ The northern wall also shows evidence of plaster remains around the window frame.

History:

While no specific historical reference has been found to this outbuilding, it is likely to have been constructed in the mid nineteenth century by Thomas Condon.

The early Lands Department plans, based on surveys of the area some years before, describe the land in the area as 'Fine forest land, lightly timbered'.² On 20th April 1855 William O'Neil purchased the 137 acres 2 roods and 21 perches, Crown Allotment 25, Parish of Yangardook.³

At an early stage O'Neill's Toolern Vale property was sold to Condon (probably Thomas), who established a large family there. In his 1983 autobiography *Cutting Green Hay*, distinguished Australian poet Vincent Buckley (1927-1988) mused on his Condon great grandparents who

¹ Helen Kirpatrick (nee Hurley), Submission to draft Heritage Study, 28/05/2007.

² Put Away Plan Y32: 'Plan of Country Lands in the Parishes of Yangardook and Holden and Kororoit, Co. Bourke' (1857); also 'Yangardook, County of Bourke' (nd)

³ Parish Plan, Parish of Yangardook.

had settled at Toolern Vale.⁴ His Condon great-grandfather and his wife, and his Buckley grandfather, were amongst the more than 100,000 Irish who poured into Victoria during the 1850s and 60s, ‘parts and victims of the great emptying of Munster (south west Ireland) throughout the nineteenth century.’⁵

Although the Melton Shire was unusual in that the majority of its early population was Irish Catholic, few were landowners at this time.⁶ However the small district, once known as ‘Kororoit’, along the Coimadai-Holden Road between Yangardook Creek in the west and Leakes Road in the east had a relatively high number of Irish names among the Crown grantees (eg, O’Neil, Ryan, Bourke, O’Connor, Phelan, and Moylan).⁷

Consequently, the O’Neill / Condon property was situated about four kilometres west of Catholic School No.362, established in 1862, the only Catholic pre school known to have been established in the Shire prior to the arrival of the religious orders after the 1872 Education Act. It was established at the ‘RC Church Site’, a picturesque Water Reserve where the Coimadai-Holden Road crossed Kororoit Creek.⁸

Attendances at the tiny shingle roofed wooden Catholic school building gradually declined from the initial 35, and the school closed in 1875 (about the time that denominational schools were required to become self-funding under the provisions of the 1872 Education Act). A few years later the school was destroyed by fire. The district was without a school until agitation resulted in the opening, on the same Water Reserve, of State School No.1933 Kororoit in 1877. This portable school was continually in danger of being closed or worked part-time with 919 New Cambridge (Rockbank) or 1447 Diggers Rest, and in 1882 it was permanently closed. The building was moved to the new site of School No.1447 on the Diggers Rest - Bulla Road, and finally to the Diggers Rest Station site, where it remained.⁹ The stumps and plantings associated with the church/school survived at least into the 1930s, although nothing is immediately visible today of either of the former ‘Kororoit’ schools.¹⁰

Vincent Buckley wrote of his family’s experience in terms of the Irish experience of settlement in Australia:

‘My Condon great-grandfather had at first a small patch, near Toolern Vale, in effect a paddock, still called Condons, with chimney and stone wallends still standing; but he moved up the hill to Coimadai, to a property which he and his sons gradually expanded, and which his grandsons ultimately lost, victims of a primogeniture that did not work. Most of the children of these large and land-hungry families were left after their parents’ death as landless as their father or grandfather had been in Ireland. But by then the professions were rapping on the window of their sight, and some of the daughters could always be expected to marry farmers.’¹¹

⁴ Buckley, Vincent, *Cutting Green Hay: friendships, movements and cultural conflicts in Australia’s great decades* (Penguin Books, Melbourne, 1983), pp.3, 4, 8, 13.

⁵ Buckley, *op cit*, p.3

⁶ Eg, Pollitt, JH, *An Historical Record of Melton* (Shire of Melton, nd), p.40; also Peel, LJ, *Rural Industry in the Port Phillip Region, 1835-1880*, (MUP, Melbourne, 1974), pp.67-71

⁷ Parish Plan, Parishes of Yangardook and Holden.

⁸ Blake, LJ (ed), *Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria*, Vol.3 (Education Department of Victoria, 1973), pp. 31, 77; also Starr, J, *Melton: Plains of Promise* (Shire of Melton, nd, c.1985), pp.174-5; also Parish Plan, Parish of Yangardook.

⁹ Blake, *loc cit*.

¹⁰ Mary Tolhurst, personal conversation

¹¹ Buckley, *op cit*, pp.8, 13

Buckley's Condon grandfather died when he was eight (c.1935).

Born in Romsey, educated at Melbourne and Cambridge Universities, Buckley was deeply passionate about Australian culture, in particular its roots and affinities with Ireland. After serving in the RAAF he became involved in post-war intellectual debates. He published seven volumes of poetry, edited *The Faber Book of Modern Australian Verse*, won many poetry prizes, was poetry editor of magazines including the *Bulletin*, and a well-known essayist, reviewer and editor. He was Professor of English at Melbourne University, where in 1967 he was awarded a personal Chair. He was awarded the Dublin University Prize in 1977, and the Christopher Brennan Award from the Fellowship of Australian Writers in 1982. In 1992 the Australian Centre at the University of Melbourne instituted the Vincent Buckley Poetry Prize. Inscribed on his grave in Melton Cemetery are the words: 'He was the piper walking in the front of battle.'

Rate records show that the Condon family was paying rates on the property in 1873 when the Net Annual Value was £35.¹² According to family history, at some stage Condon moved his family to Coimadai, but retained ownership of the Toolern Vale land. An 1892 map shows that Allotment 25 still in the name 'Condon'.¹³ By 1903, Edmund and Michael Condon, farmers, were the owners of the property, whose value had declined slightly (NAV £30).¹⁴

In 1915 Edward Condon, farmer, was the listed owner, the NAV being £58. There is no indication in the ratebooks as to improvements on the property but the considerable rise in valuation suggests that some improvements had been undertaken.

In 1915 the local paper carried a sale notice for the 'estate of Patrick William Condon', authorized by the 'Master in Lunacy'. Mr Condon, the *Express* explained, was formerly a resident of Diggers Rest, but was now a 'patient' [at Kew mental hospital]. He was related to Thomas Condon of Diggers Rest. Allotment 25 - 'Condon's Paddock' as it was described – of 137 acres 2r 21p, had a frontage of one mile to the Toolern-Holden road, two miles from Toolern Vale, adjoining Hugh Campbell's paddock, and also Mr Browne's *Green Hills* property. It was well situated, watered by a creek and two dams. A portion was cultivated, and a portion lightly timbered.¹⁵

The daughter of the former owner, Helen Kirpatrick (nee Hurley) states that William Hurley Snr (1883-1931), her grandfather, purchased 'Condon's Paddock' in 1915. William Hurley senior also owned a farm on Blackhill Road and the 'Hurley House' at 1374 Gisbourne – Melton Highway, where he resided with his wife Elizabeth and 7 children. The Condon's Paddock was equidistant from both properties; therefore there was no need for any dwelling to be constructed on the 'Condon's Paddock' dairy property. She also states that on William Hurley's death, the 137 acres was left to three of his sons William, Len and Norman Hurley. William Hurley Junior bought the shares of the property from his 2 brothers. William Hurley Jnr utilised the property for grazing and cropping. Between 1985-1990 William Hurley Jnr (1919-1990) subdivided the 137 acres into 3 blocks and sold the property now known to be 1397 – 1457 Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road to Patrick & Bridget Pucell. The Pucell family built the brick dwelling that currently exists on the property, before selling it to the current

¹² Shire of Melton, *Ratebook*, 1873

¹³ Shire Map Series, 1892: 'Parish of Yangardook' (SLV 821.1A)

¹⁴ Shire of Melton, *Ratebook*, 1903

¹⁵ Melton Express, 26/6/1915. (The title was: Vol.897 Fol.274)

owners in 2001.¹⁶ After many years of standing as a near ruin, the long stone building set back in the property was repaired and re-roofed by the new owners.¹⁷

Since well before 1915, and still to this day, the property has been known as ‘Condon’s’, or ‘Condon’s Paddock’.¹⁸ The use of the word ‘paddock’ might imply that the land was a farming asset rather than a home for most of its history. The stone building on the land (possibly a dairy) and the remains of another stone building (possibly the dwelling the ruins of which Buckley described in 1983) might date to the early O’Neill/Condon period. The family history, which confirms the early occupation of the property, supports this, as does the primitive style and materials of the building. The fact that the original track was further south than the present road, meaning that the building would have been closer to the road than at present, might also support this.¹⁹ Although there appears to be no local memory of a dwelling, or any occupation of the property, during the twentieth century, it is conceivable that there may also have been development of the property around the turn of the century, when dairying proliferated, and when its valuation increased markedly.

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Melton Historical Themes: ‘Farming’

Known Comparable Examples in Melton Shire:

The outbuilding at 1397-1457 Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road represents one of few surviving Victorian vernacular styled random rubble outbuildings in the Melton Shire. Other comparable examples of this type include:

- Stable at *Evansdale* farm complex, 678 Boundary Road, Truganina (Place No.327). This building has a gable roof form clad in galvanised corrugated steel and bluestone wall construction.
- Cottage, Blackhill Road, Toolern Vale (Place No.061). This hut is an altered example of the Victorian vernacular style with random rubble wall construction. The outbuilding at 1397-1457 Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road appears to be more intact.
- Bluestone dwelling, Leakes Rd (Place No.144). A Victorian vernacular styled bluestone dwelling with a steeply pitched hipped roof clad in galvanised corrugated steel. The openings in the building are missing.
- Rubble stone outbuilding associated with the Porter family’s *Inwood*, Coburns Road (Place No.12). This building is of very similar proportions as well as materials to Condon’s. It has more windows, and a small loft. It has a new roof, and its interior appears to be more intact than Condons.

Condition:

Fair

¹⁶ Helen Kirpatrick (nee Hurley), Submission to draft Heritage Study, 21 February 2007.

¹⁷ Mary Tolhurst, personal conversation.

¹⁸ Leo Tarleton, personal conversation, 27/12/2001; John Beaty, personal conversation, 8/5/2002

¹⁹ ‘Yangardook, County of Bourke’ (nd)

Integrity:

Moderately intact

Recommendations:

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.
Recommended for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Inventory.

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

External Paint Controls:	<i>Yes</i>
Internal Alteration Controls:	<i>No</i>
Tree Controls:	<i>No</i>
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	<i>Yes – remnant adjacent random rubble walling providing evidence of a former building.</i>