

**Heritage Overlay No.:** 030  
**Citation No.:** 038  
**Place:** Ruin, 'The Elms', 779-859 Gisborne  
- Melton Road

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**Other Names of Place:** None  
**Location:** 779-859 Gisborne-Melton Road, Toolern Vale  
(CA 44, Parish of Yangardook)  
**Critical Dates:** Initial construction c.1855-1861; destruction by  
fire 1965.  
**Existing Heritage Listings:** None  
**Recommended Level of Significance:** LOCAL



**Statement of Significance:**

The Ruin of *The Elms*, 779-859 Gisborne Melton Road, Toolern Vale, is significant as a now scarce relic of the first farming period in the Shire, and of the bushfires that have been a major theme in the history of the Shire. The ruin of the dwelling, built by the early 1860s, is a prominent part of an early and attractive cultural landscape of high significance in both the pastoral and farming histories of the Shire.

The Ruin of *The Elms*, 779-859 Gisborne Melton Road, Toolern Vale, is historically significant at the Local level (AHC A4, B2, D2). It is situated in the location of an important early 1840s outstation of the *Green Hills* pastoral station, at that time the largest and most developed in the Shire. The hills of this area, stretching to Gisborne and towards Sunbury, are also of wider

significance in the history of Victoria's settlement, as the meeting place of the two streams of Port Phillip's European settlers, the 'overstraiters' from Tasmanian and the 'overlanders' from New South Wales. This upper Toolern Creek valley, between Bensons Road and Toolern Vale, then became a rich part of the farming history of the Shire. The place is a prominent part of a cultural landscape that contains a concentration of early farm dwellings and structures (including dry stone walls), now mainly ruinous due to bushfires and the passage of time, and views from Gisborne-Melton Road over the rich farmlands and attractive valley to the ranges and plains beyond. The ruin is also a now-scarce relic of the 'first farming' period of the Shire: on farms purchased from the Crown in the 1850s, rather than the later the Selection Acts, or created in the break-up of the large pastoral estates in the early twentieth century. To a lesser extent, through its association with the Russell and McIntosh families, the place is also associated with the Scottish enclave in Toolern Vale in this early period. The place, destroyed in the notorious 1965 bushfire that destroyed most houses and all community and commercial buildings in the township of Toolern, is also expressive of the major role of bushfires in the Shire of Melton.

The Ruin of *The Elms*, 779-859 Gisborne Melton Road, Toolern Vale, is socially significant at the Local level (AHC G1). It was identified as a place of heritage significance to the local community in a community forum held as part of this heritage study.

Overall, the Ruin of *The Elms*, 779-859 Gisborne Melton Road, Toolern Vale, is of LOCAL significance.

#### **Description:**

The ruin is situated on the east side of the Gisborne-Melton Road, approximately 500 metres south of the McPhersons Road intersection, Toolern Vale. It is impressively set, in an open undulating paddock, overlooking the creek, with the Black Hills and Flagstaff Hills as a backdrop when viewed from the road.

The ruin consists of two perpendicular walls c.2 metres in height, meeting at a former window or door. The double walls are constructed of random rubble, unquarried stone, of both local bluestone and sedimentary varieties. Gaps in the wall facing have been plugged with smaller stones to contribute stability and a flat surface. Sides of openings have been constructed of roughly squared stones. Remnants of render and whitewash remain on outside surfaces. A few bricks have been used in parts of the walls. Repairs in modern mortar have been undertaken on some external surfaces.

Pepper trees on the creek below probably mark the former dairy.

#### **History:**

##### *The Pastoral Era.*

Very early maps, prior to the government surveyors marking out the parish of Yangardook for subdivision and sale, record the topography (particularly the streams) and show the beginnings of pastoral occupation of the country.

One such map, dating to the early 1840s, shows the name 'Hyde' in a large rectangle to the west of the Toolern Creek. The northern portion of this rectangle includes the present site – from the land later occupied by the original McIntosh house on the corner of MacPherson Lane

(Ruin, Place No.36) southward, probably to take in this place (*The Elms*), and westwards over the present Gisborne – Melton Road.<sup>1</sup>

This rectangle and name marked an outstation of John Hunter Patterson's *Green Hills* station, which from 1841 to 1843 had been taken over by George Hyde.<sup>2</sup> In 1841, months prior to Hyde taking over *Green Hills*, a census of squatters in the district showed that *Green Hills* was the largest of all the early Melton pastoral stations in terms of employees. It supported 26 persons ('all free'), including 15 shepherds.<sup>3</sup> A shepherd, and probably a hutkeeper, would have lived somewhere within the area marked on the early map. Although it is unlikely that a shepherd's hut would have been of a size or quality of construction that would have accommodated a late nineteenth century farming family, it is possible that either this (or more likely the ruin of the smaller and more primitive original McIntosh house (Place No.38) were built on the site of an original shepherd's hut. (It is conceivable that the chimney base of Place No.38, of quite primitive construction, may even date to this pastoral period.)

George Hyde died on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1844, travelling from *Green Hills* to Melbourne. In contrast to Aitken, Pyke, Yuille, Evans, Jackson and the other early squatters Vandemonian 'overstraiters', Hyde, like Howey, Coghill, Riddell and Hamilton, had been one of the New South Wales overlanders. An *Argus* article of 1945 suggested that the hills between Sunbury and Gisborne, including the areas of the *Green Hills* and *Mount Aitken* pastoral stations in the Shire of Melton, was an area of pre-eminent significance in the early pastoral history of Victoria. As the meeting place of the two streams of European settlement of Port Phillip, 'these hills take pride of place in the pastoral and agricultural development of the State...'<sup>4</sup>

Apart from *Green Hills* headstation itself, which is similarly marked 'Hyde', and with a large rectangle, this was the only other place marked in this way on the station. While later plans show other *Green Hills* outstation sites – in the scrubby ranges near Djerriwarrh Creek, on McCorkells Road, (Place 44), and two further downstream on Toolern Creek (Places 26 and 57) – this place would appear to have been the second ranked pasture land, and station, on the *Green Hills*.

The significance of this area is confirmed in later plans (c.early 1850s) which show a larger rectangle marked 'Grass Paddock' further down the Toolern Creek, on Allotment 43, between the Elms (Place No.38) and the township of Toolern.<sup>5</sup> This is one of only three 'grass paddocks' (presumably fenced) shown on *Green Hills*: one at the headstation itself, another in the valleys just north of O'Connell Avenue, and this one. So again, the Toolern Creek valley between Toolern Vale and McPhersons Road is set apart as one of the most important parts of the *Green Hills* station.

### *The Farming Era.*

This attractive and rich valley that had been prominent in the early pastoral settlement of the Toolern Vale area was also highly valued in the farming era.

On 20<sup>th</sup> February 1855 Crown Allotment No.44, Parish of Yangardook, of 126 acres 3 roods and 5 perches, was sold by the Crown to T Russell.<sup>6</sup> Of the very little that is known of Russell,

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<sup>1</sup> Land Victoria, Historical Plan: 'Roll 113' (184?)

<sup>2</sup> Land Victoria: Historical Plan: 'Roll 11' (c.1841); Starr, *op cit*, p.76

<sup>3</sup> 1841 Census, New South Wales (Port Phillip District) , Return No.13.

<sup>4</sup> *The Argus*, 14/7/1945

<sup>5</sup> Plan L.2035: 'Yangardook, Co. Bourke' (nd). (These paddocks are still marked on the 1892 Shire Map Series plans for the Parish of Yangardook.)

<sup>6</sup> Parish Plan, Parish of Yangardook

it is clear that he actually settled on the property, and became part of the local community. In fact Robert Lidgett, whose family later lived on the site, gave him a distinguished mention in terms of early Toolern Vale history:- ‘Prominent among the earliest settlers of Toolern Vale was the late T Grant, Messrs Russell and Porter ....’<sup>7</sup> In another of the 1905 ‘Melton Reminiscences’ retired Shire Secretary James Luke Robertson includes Russell in his list of ‘the clans’ who were always to the front in community life.<sup>8</sup>

However he was not amongst the many local residents who in 1867 petitioned for a school at Toolern Vale, or represented on the Yangardook Local School Committee in 1869.<sup>9</sup> He either did not have children, or he had left the area by this time. In fact a report on the farms in the district in 1876 suggests that Mr Robert Lidgett had farmed and lived on the property, south of McIntosh, and north of Burton, since 1861.<sup>10</sup>

The *Australasian’s* ‘Travelling Reporter’ credited Lidgett with 500 acres of land, but Allotment 44 was only 127 acres, and he had selected some 100 acres under the Land Acts, so the bulk of this must have been rented nearby (perhaps from *Green Hills*).<sup>11</sup> ‘The greater portion’ of the property had ‘rich chocolate loam’ soil, and there was ‘a plentiful supply of water being at all times available, the Toolern Creek running through the property.’ Until recently, Lidgett had had 150 acres of crop annually, but (like virtually all neighbouring farms) this had declined over the past seven years, ‘as he finds grazing to give better and surer net returns.’ Of the crops, English Barley had proven the most profitable of late, but ‘dairying is now the chief pursuit, butter making being the speciality.’ Some 15-20 cows were milked during the year, and there were a total of 150 cattle. Lidgett had made a start on breeding pure Shorthorn cattle, and also horses (some of the stud coming from Henry Beattie’s *Mount Aitken* property). The property was divided into about 20 paddocks by ‘good substantial fences’, and about 300 acres had been improved by sowing English grasses; about three times as many stock could be kept on rye grass than the natural pastures. As with all but the most substantial properties, the article does not mention the Lidgett house.<sup>12</sup>

Lidgett had growing property interests elsewhere (Myrniong, Greendale) and in 1892 ‘Burton’ was shown as the owner of Allotment 44.<sup>13</sup> In 1876 Burton had been described as Lidgett’s neighbour on the south, and he had obviously acquired the Lidgett farm along the way. Lidgett’s reminiscences accord him a prominence in the pioneering years of Melton and Toolern Vale:

‘Messrs JL Robertson, T Burton, and Buchanan were also identified with the early settlement of Melton.’ .... ‘Mr Burton subsequently moved to Toolern Vale where his sons reside at the present time.’<sup>14</sup>

In November 1867 Thomas Burton was one of a group of interested Toolern Vale parents who petitioned for the establishment of a Toolern Vale school.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> RL Lidgett, *Melton Express*, 23/9/1905

<sup>8</sup> JL Robertson, *Melton Express*, 30/9/1905

<sup>9</sup> Toolern Vale State School Centenary Celebrations Committee, *Toolern Vale State School Centenary History 1869-1969* (1969), p.6

<sup>10</sup> *The Australasian*, 25/11/1876

<sup>11</sup> J Bilszta’s notes on M&DHS transcript of Lidgett’s *Melton Express* reminiscences. He also had substantial landholdings at Coimadai, Myrniong and (in 1878) at Greendale, and some of this may have been included in his reported 500 acres.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

<sup>13</sup> Shire Map Series (1892): Parish of Yangardook.

<sup>14</sup> Lidgett, *Express*, *op cit*

He had farmed Allotment 44 since 1866, and his farm in 1876 was said to be 380 acres.<sup>16</sup> It would appear that Burton moved into the Russell/Lidgett dwelling, because in 1892 Allotment 44 (*The Elms*) was shown as the family's principal property.<sup>17</sup>

At some time after 1905, when Lidgett notes that his sons were still living on their Toolern Vale property, the Burtons sold out to their neighbours to the north, the Donald McIntosh family. The McIntosh's had been living in the very small house on the north-east corner of McPhersons Lane since 1864 (the ruin of this house is Place No.36).<sup>18</sup> Prior to the erection of the building Toolern Presbyterian Church services had been held in this dwelling.

Mrs Mary McIntosh was the daughter of Peter McDonald, who owned Allotment No.47 (Place No.37) to their north. In 1888 Peter McDonald and his son Charles both died, and the property (with cottage) was purchased by the McIntosh family.

Donald McIntosh senior died at his Toolern Vale home in 1903 after a short illness, aged 68 years. The *Express* reported that 'he and his family have always been much respected. He was known to be a man of keen judgement and honest transactions.'<sup>19</sup>

In 1904 Donald junior, Charles and John acquired land from the Clarke estate in the Parish of Kororoit (on Ryans Road Melton, Place No.237). Although the family was generally of a retiring nature, Alexander was elected to the Melton Shire Council. However he suffered from tuberculosis (as did a number of his siblings) and died in 1905 just weeks after his wife and sister.

After the death of Donald McIntosh senior Charles withdrew from the Ryans Road land to work the family's Toolern Vale property. After the McIntoshs purchased the Burtons property, Mrs McIntosh and her sons moved from their small original house on the corner of McPherson Lane, to 'The Elms', which was a big house, with her sons. Mary Tolhurst (nee Tarleton) used visit her, and her sons 'Johnny and Charlie', with her mother in the 1930s.<sup>20</sup>

Mrs Mary McIntosh died on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1935. The *Express* reported her passing:-  
'A very old and much respected resident of the district in the person of Mrs Mary McIntosh, widow of the late Donald McIntosh who predeceased her over 20 years ago passed peacefully away at her residence, *The Elms*, Toolern Vale, on Saturday evening. The late Mrs McIntosh had she been spared would have reached her 91<sup>st</sup> birthday on 1<sup>st</sup> July .... The deceased, who possessed a genial and hospitable nature had, during her long life, won the admiration and esteem of all with whom she had come in contact. A large circle of friends mourn her passing. The funeral, which took place on Monday, was largely attended when the remains were laid to rest in the Melton cemetery beside those of her husband and several of her children. The Rev Suitor of Gisborne Presbyterian Church officiated firstly at her home and then at the graveside. Sympathy is felt for the three sons and one daughter and many grandchildren at losing so worthy a head of family.'<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Toolern Vale State School Centenary History, *loc cit*

<sup>16</sup> The *Australasian*, *op cit*.

<sup>17</sup> Shire Map Series (1892), Yangardook

<sup>18</sup> The *Australasian*, 25/11/1876

<sup>19</sup> The *Bacchus Marsh Express*, 6/6/1903

<sup>20</sup> Mary Tolhurst, personal conversation, 12/2/2006

<sup>21</sup> *Melton Express* 15/6/1935

The last of the siblings, Charles died at Toolern Vale in 1962, aged 79 years. In his young days he had been a greyhound-racing enthusiast and a supporter of the Plumpton.

### *The Scots*

Although there were relatively more Scots in the Bacchus Marsh district, the Melton and Bulla Shires had a notably high proportion of people of Scots in relation to English, according to Lynette Peel's study. The Scottish people often comprised 'pockets' within the community. In general, they were affluent and skilled in farming relative to the Irish, of whom there were more in the Melton area, but who mostly worked as farm labourers during the 1850s. Many Scots had been able to obtain land in the 1850s and, while many moved out of the Melton district in the 1860s (poor seasons and prices), those who didn't were well-established. In contrast the Irish who had missed the first opportunities were able to purchase land that had been quitted in the 1860s.<sup>22</sup> In Melton Shire this opportunity also seems to have applied to poorer or younger people of any nationality, including perhaps Scots from the Highlands and Hebrides.

In 1861 the Melton – Toolern Vale area was one of the 'pockets' of Scottish people. Of the total estimated population of 947 for the district, the nascent Melton Cemetery Committee reckoned that 158 were Church of England, 197 were 'Scots', 252 Roman Catholics, 27 Wesleyans, 15 Baptists, 10 Independents, and 288 of unknown faith.<sup>23</sup>

In 1905 James Luke Robertson, retired Shire Secretary, remembered the Melton area in the early days:-

'What a number of the clans were represented, there were the McDonalds, McLeods, Grants, McPhersons, McIlwraiths, McGranes, Campbells, McKenzies, McIntosh, Buchanan, Raleigh, Murdie, Oldershaw, MacTaggart, Russell, Gibson, Blackwood and others whose names I forget, who were always to the front in these matters from first to last.'<sup>24</sup>

There was a notable concentration of these Scottish families in the rich Toolern Vale area. On the inaugural Yangardook Local School Committee there were 6 Presbyterians (including Donald McIntosh), one Church of England, and one Roman Catholic.<sup>25</sup>

### *The Land and the Landscape*

*The Elms*, and its valley, was rich. It was 'good land at Toolern Vale' says Donald McIntosh of Ryans Road.<sup>26</sup> Ian Hunt of Bensons Road (1-2 kilometres north) relates that in the early days, prior to the ravages of the disease phylloxera in the 1870s, the small blocks on Bensons Road grew vines.<sup>27</sup> The Rural Heritage Study also reports that a vineyard on Allotment 47 (acquired by McIntosh) supplied Seppelts with vinegar grapes.<sup>28</sup> Hunt advises that it is 'beautiful soil' as far as Harold Wilsons (the original Kitson property, where Missens Road terminates at Toolern Creek, about 1.5 kilometres south of Toolern Vale. The area above Toolern Vale also had 'good rainfall' (26 inches).<sup>29</sup> Wheat from the Kitson farm (Place No.28) won the gold cup

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<sup>22</sup> Peel, LJ, *Rural Industry in the Port Phillip Region, 1835-1880*, (MUP, Melbourne, 1974), pp.67-71

<sup>23</sup> Pollitt, JH, *An Historical Record of Melton* (Shire of Melton, nd), p.40

<sup>24</sup> *Melton Express*, 30/9/1905

<sup>25</sup> Toolern Vale State School Centenary History, *loc cit*

<sup>26</sup> McIntosh, *op cit*.

<sup>27</sup> Ian Hunt, personal conversation, 6/3/2002

<sup>28</sup> Johnston, *loc cit*.

<sup>29</sup> Hunt, *op cit*; the valley land contrasts with other nearby land, eg on McCorkells Road, which has more clay.

for wheat at a London Crystal Palace Exhibition in the 1860s, and the Governors Cup for the best field of hay grown in Victoria ‘the crop being as high as the fence and as level as a billiard table.’<sup>30</sup>

The 1876 reports by the *Australasian’s* Travelling Reporter make clear that, although the land had produced ‘heavy’ crops, since about 1870 farmers in the area had been moving away from cropping in favour of grazing, in particular dairying / butter, which gave better and more consistent returns.

In the early twentieth century most of the farms in the area were still dairying, growing growing oaten hay to feed their own cattle when feed was scarce. In the mid to late twentieth century most of the farmers were cropping the land again, mainly with barley and peas. Some also raised sheep and (mostly dairy) cattle.<sup>31</sup>

The beautiful and lush upper Toolern Creek valley has always then been attractive to European settlers, from the pastoralists to the first wave of farmers in the Shire, evidence of which survives in the form of bluestone ruins, and dry stone walls, and plantings. Some of the places in the cultural landscape between Gisborne Melton Road and the Black Ranges (Place No.3, on the corner of Bensons Road, and Place No.38, *The Elms*) have been destroyed in the fires that have swept down from the hills towards and beyond Toolern Vale, including the devastating 1965 fire.

#### *The House.*

The house likely dates to the occupation of the site by Russell, probably soon after he purchased it in 1855. It could however have been extended by Lidgett, or even Burton. The surviving stone part of the dwelling is likely to have been earlier than the more extensive weatherboard parts.

Maps of 1916 and 1938 show a house on the site, together with the houses on the adjacent McIntosh properties:- the restored cottage to the north (Place No.37), and the ruins of the original house to the immediate north (Place No.36). There was a house further north again (now a relic of a chimney on the corner of Bensons Road, Place No.3), and another further south (recently comprising footings only, and possibly now removed) on allotment 43.<sup>32</sup>

Mary Tolhurst remembers *The Elms* as a big house, essentially of timber, with a corrugated iron roof, and a stone chimney. There was a ‘well’ at the kitchen door, and a cow shed and dairy down towards the creek.<sup>33</sup>

Presumably the house remained vacant after Charles McIntosh’s death in 1962. The house was destroyed in the devastating February 1965 Toolern Vale bushfire.<sup>34</sup>

The timber stock yards beside the house are modern, having been erected after the 1965 fire. Two stone walls of the house still stand, a marker in the view over the beautiful open valley towards the Black Hills and Flagstaff Hill travelling south on the Gisborne-Melton Road.

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<sup>30</sup> Alexander Cameron, *Melton Memoirs* (M&DHS, nd), p.2; Anders Hjorth ‘Recollections of Melton 1861-67’ (M&DHS Newsletter, Feb.2001); Christopher Crisp, ‘Melton Cemetery’ (Melton Express, 2/9/05).

<sup>31</sup> Hunt, *op cit*.

<sup>32</sup> Shire Map Series, *op cit*; Army Ordnance Maps (‘Sunbury’): 1916, 1938

<sup>33</sup> Tolhurst, *op cit*.

<sup>34</sup> McIntosh, Tolhurst etc, *op cit*

### **Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:**

*Melton Historical Themes: ‘Pastoral’; ‘Farming’*

*Known Comparable Example in Melton Shires:*

*The Elms* is a substantial ruin of one of relatively very few ‘first farming’ period (ie, on farmland purchased from the Crown in the 1850s, rather under the Selection Acts in the 1860s and 70s, or the break-up of the large pastoral estates in the early twentieth century) cottages remaining in the Shire. Intact (but modified) examples of stone cottages include:-

- The small bluestone cottage – the former ‘Yangardook’ now restored - on Gisborne Melton Road (Place No.037);
- The small cottage on Blackhills Road (Place No.061), which has been substantially repaired (including chimneys, roof, and verandah).
- The abandoned bluestone cottage on the former *Mt Kororoit Farm* property, west of Kororoit Creek (Place No.144);
- The half derelict, half intact bluestone Paynes Cottage (Place No.373).
- The small cottages on *Glen Elgin* (Place No.039) opposite *The Elms*, also of sedimentary stone, were apparently built in the mid twentieth century.
- The considerably altered former *Fulham Park*, on Beatty’s Road, Rockbank (Place No.316)
- The stone cottages and outbuildings that are part of the large pastoral stations of *Rockbank* (Place No.428), *Exford* (Place No.269), and *Eynesbury* (Place No.281).
- The Honey Shack, 7-9 High Street Melton (Place No.221). Restored and altered town cottage.
- *Evansdale* (Place No.327): a now uninhabitable early stone cottage and earlier stone outbuildings.
- *Dunvegan* (Place No.228): a relocated and altered township dwelling.

The adjacent ruinous hearth of McIntosh cottage (Place No.036) utilises the local sedimentary stone in its construction, in a vernacular form, with professional skills evident in shaping or finishing stone, but with considerable vernacular skill;

### **Condition:**

Ruinous

### **Integrity:**

Damaged/Disturbed



**Recommendations:**

Recommended for inclusion in the:-

- Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay
- Victorian Heritage Inventory

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

External Paint Controls:	<i>Yes</i>
Internal Alteration Controls:	<i>No</i>
Tree Controls:	<i>Yes (nearby pepper trees, and other exotic species with them)</i>
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	<i>No</i>



The rural setting of the ruin, visible from the Gisborne – Melton Road, overlooking the Toolern Creek valley.