

Heritage Overlay No.: 031
Citation No.: 039
Place: ‘Glen Elgin’, 766-858 Gisborne-Melton Road

Other Names of Place: None
Location: 766-858 Gisborne-Melton Road, Toolern Vale (Lot 1 PS 438440)
Critical Dates: Brick barn/stables construction: pre-1876; House construction: unknown (c.1921); Rubble sandstone cottages: unknown (c.1944)
Existing Heritage Listings: ‘Place of Interest’ (Rural Heritage Study)¹
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

Glen Elgin, 766 Gisborne-Melton Road, Toolern Vale, is significant as a surviving and substantial example of a late nineteenth and early twentieth century farm complex comprising a timber Federation styled main house (albeit altered), substantial brick stables, timber open shed, substantial stone-lined underground tank with a gabled galvanised corrugated steel roof, galvanised corrugated steel and timber shearing shed, two random rubble interwar cottages (one in poor condition), and cattle yard bound by timber post and rail fencing. The setting of the

¹ Johnston, C, ‘Rural Heritage Study: Western Region of Melbourne’ (Context Pty Ltd, Melbourne Western Region Inc, 1994), Site M3, pp.35, 175-6

place, comprising a long drive having mature Monterey cypresses, is significant as are the mature conifers, palm tree and other plantings associated with the main and former house gardens. The property was originally established c.1855 by prominent Toolern Vale pioneer and Melton citizen Thomas Grant, and developed as a nationally celebrated Ayershire cattle study by his son, TA Grant, also a prominent local citizen. The date of the present house is unknown, but is likely to have been built for Grant son-in-law A Tedcastle c.1920. The rubble sedimentary stone cottages and another outbuilding on the property are significant for their association with Italian prisoners of war during the Second World War.

Glen Elgin, 766 Gisborne-Melton Road, Toolern Vale, is aesthetically and architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC D.2, E.1). The complex of farm buildings, including the Federation styled main house (albeit altered), substantial brick stables, timber open shed, substantial stone-lined underground tank with a gabled galvanised corrugated steel roof, three-stand shearing shed, two random rubble interwar cottages and similar shed, cattle yard bound by timber post and rail fencing, together with the long drive with Monterey cypresses, the main house garden with mature conifers, palm tree and other plantings, the Algerian Oak, Bunya Bunya Pine and Osage Orange in the vicinity of the original homestead, and the seven English Oaks spaced along the road boundary, demonstrate those significant architectural and visual qualities.

In particular, although altered, the main house demonstrates some design qualities of a Federation style. These qualities include the complex of gable roof forms clad in galvanised corrugated steel, asymmetrical composition, two storey height, horizontal timber weatherboard wall cladding, timber framed windows, brick chimneys with rendered tops, timber framed windows, timber bargeboards, and the return verandah supported by timber posts.

The brick stables demonstrates original design qualities that include the elongated steeply pitched gable roof form and skillion wing clad in galvanised corrugated steel, hand-made brick wall construction, brick chimney with a corbelled top, timber framed window and door openings (except the large opening at one end) and the timber loft door.

The two random rubble cottages demonstrate original design qualities of an interwar vernacular style, including the gable roof forms, galvanised corrugated steel roof cladding, timber barge boards, stone and red brick chimneys, modest eaves with exposed timber rafters (small cottage), timber framed window and door openings and the single storey height.

Glen Elgin, 766 Gisborne-Melton Road, Toolern Vale, is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4, B2, H1). It is situated on the site 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 contributory 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.

Glen Elgin also testifies to the prominence of Scottish settlers in the farming history of the Shire, particularly in early Toolern Vale. It was associated with Scotsman Thomas Grant,

pioneer and leader of the Toolern Vale community, councillor of the Melton Roads Board, treasurer of the Melton Agricultural Society and, with his wife Janet, greatly involved in the local Presbyterian church. In the period of his son Thomas Alexander *Glen Elgin* became a nationally known Ayresshire stud property. TA Grant was a contributor to local causes, in particular the establishment and ongoing success of the Toolern Vale Mechanics Institute and, with his wife Mary (nee Blackwood), the local Presbyterian church.

Glen Elgin is also significant for its association with the Italian Prisoner of War farm labourer scheme 1943-47. This scheme was the result of the victories of the Australian infantry in the Western Desert Forces during the Second World War with the consequent high number of Italian prisoners, and the war induced rural labour shortage in Australia. Italian POWs employed on *Glen Elgin* constructed the three random rubble sedimentary stone buildings on the property for their own accommodation and other purposes. Bhutan cypresses near one of the cottages are also likely to date to this period.

Glen Elgin, 766 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 the community forum held as part of this study.

Overall, *Glen Elgin* off the Gisborne-Melton Road is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

Glen Elgin off the Gisborne-Melton Road, Toolern Vale, consists of a small complex of farm buildings in rural surroundings including the main timber house, open timber shed, two random rubble cottages and a similar shed, brick barn/stables, timber and galvanised corrugated steel shearing shed, very large sedimentary rubble stone-lined underground tank with gabled galvanised steel roof, early cattle yards bound by timber post and rail fencing and recent drystone walls. The elevated main house has outstanding views down the Toolern Creek valley towards Melbourne.

Also significant at *Glen Elgin* is the extensive use of *Cupressus macrocarpa* (Monterey cypress) hedging along the driveway and as protection around the homestead, and the seven *Quercus robur* (English oak) widely spaced along the highway boundary.

The two storey, asymmetrical, horizontal timber weatherboard, altered Federation styled main house is characterised by complex gable roof forms clad in galvanised corrugated steel. The irregular nature of the design suggests that it has been altered and extended over time. Other early features include the brick chimneys with rendered tops, timber framed windows, timber bargeboards, and the return verandah supported by timber posts.

A large ornamental setting featuring mature conifers and a palm, together with other plantings, as well as a pool and a terrace that may originally have comprised a tennis court.

One of the more substantial outbuildings is the brick stables, constructed of hand-made bricks and now part of an equestrian complex. It has an elongated steeply pitched gable roof form and skillion wing clad in galvanised corrugated steel, brick chimney with a corbelled top and early timber framed window and door openings. A larger window and door opening has been introduced at one end, although the early timber loft door survives above.

The open timber shed also has an elongated gable roof form and skillion wing clad in galvanised corrugated steel, with horizontal timber weatherboard wall cladding. This building is structurally unsound and is on a noticeable lean. It is supported by timber posts.

West of the homestead are the interwar vernacular styled random rubble cottages, and small shed. The smaller cottage has a gable roof form clad in galvanised corrugated steel and a red brick chimney with a soldier coursed top. There are early timber bargeboards in the gable ends and modest eaves with exposed timber rafters. Other early features include the timber framed window opening and the single timber framed door opening with a vertically boarded door. Adjacent to this cottage is a plantation of *Cupressus torulosa* (Bhutan cypress); the age of the trees and their location suggest the likely relationship between the two.

The second, larger cottage is in poor condition. It has an elongated gable roof form, with a substantial proportion of the galvanised steel roof cladding missing, exposing the timber rafters and battens to the weather. There are early timber framed window and door openings and an early stone brick chimney that is centrally located on the rear longitudinal wall.

The old three-stand shearing shed also features an elongated gable roof form and a skillion wing, clad in galvanised corrugated steel. The skillion wing also has horizontal timber weatherboard wall cladding.

There are a number of mature exotic trees to the south and west of the house which indicate the location of the original *Glen Elgin* homestead. These include very fine specimens of *Quercus canariensis* (Algerian oak), and an *Araucaria bidwillii* (Bunya bunya pine). The Bunya bunya (from Queensland) was a popular signature plant around Western District homesteads where it adapted well; it is most unusual to find an example in this district. Nearby is a mature *Maclura pomifera* (Osage orange) a rarely planted tree that was used in the early days as a protective hedge for it was relatively fast growing and tended to sucker.

The metal and timber cattle yards are said to hold evidence of a stone hut. There is said to be a ships bell associated with former owners on the property.²

An Alston windmill survives at the gully near the entrance to the property.

The seven *Quercus robur* (English oak) widely spaced along the Melton-Gisborne Road boundary also contribute to the significance of *Glen Elgin*.

History:

The Value of the Land: Pastoral and Farming Eras.

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 – the land later occupied by the Elms – and stretches south to take in the adjacent ruin (Place No.38), and westwards over the present Gisborne – Melton Road.³

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.⁴ In 1841, months prior to

² Susannah Downes, interview, 8/2/2001

³ Land Victoria, Historical Plan: 'Roll 113' (184?)

⁴ Land Victoria: Historical Plan: 'Roll 11' (c.1841); Starr, *op cit*, p.76

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.⁵ A shepherd, and probably a hutkeeper, would have lived somewhere within the area marked on the early map.

George Hyde died on 1st 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...'⁶

Apart from *Green Hills* headstation itself, which is similarly marked 'Hyde' with a large rectangle, this was the only other place marked in this way on *Green Hills*. 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 *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 Crown Allotment 43, between the Elms (Place No.38) and the township of Toolern.⁷ 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.

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. Local farmer Ian Hunt advises that it is 'beautiful soil' from Benson Road area to as far as 'Harold Wilsons' (the original Kitson farm, 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).⁸ Wheat from the Kitson farm (Place No.28) won the gold cup 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.'⁹

Establishment of Glen Elgin.

On 20th February 1855 'T Grant' purchased from the Crown Allotments 48 (c.131 acres), 49 (on which the homestead is erected, of c.147 acres), and 51 (c.123 acres), Parish of Yangardook. On 10th December he acquired the adjacent Allotment 50 (c.139 acres). On 9th

⁵ 1841 Census, New South Wales (Port Phillip District) , Return No.13.

⁶The *Argus*, 14/7/1945

⁷ Plan L.2035: 'Yangardook, Co. Bourke' (nd). (These paddocks are still marked on the 1892 Shire Map Series plans for the Parish of Yangardook.)

⁸ Hunt, *op cit*; the valley land contrasts with other nearby land, eg on McCorkells Road, which has more clay.

⁹ 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).

October he added adjacent Allotments 73 (c.125 acres) and 74 (c.95 acres). On 28th September 1864 he acquired Crown Allotment 76 (30 acres), on 1st August 1866 Allotment 77 (c.85 acres), and on 5th October 1869 Allotment 82 (21 acres).¹⁰ These contiguous allotments totaled 896 acres.

Thomas Grant was born in Morayshire, Scotland, 1811, and arrived in Port Phillip in 1839 with farm implements brought from Scotland,¹¹ so apparently never aspired to establishing a pastoral empire. He had married Janet Black also of Morayshire, in Scotland.

Electoral Rolls show Thomas Grant, ‘farmer’, in possession of freehold land at (variously) ‘Greenhills’, ‘Yangardook’, and ‘*Glen Elgin*’, by 1856.¹²

An early version of the Parish Plan shows a fence along the Gisborne-Melton Road boundary of this site; a low (c.2 course) dry stone wall on the east boundary of Coburns Road (the west boundary of this property) is likely the remains of this fence. This wall would appear to date to the early 1850s.¹³

Thomas Grant senior died suddenly on the 6th March 1873, aged 62. His resting place at Melton Cemetery is marked by a large and beautiful polished granite obelisk surrounded by ornamental metal picket fence. Over 30 years later, the editor of the local paper, on a stroll through the Melton Cemetery, remembered ‘Thomas Grant of *Glen Elgin*’ as:

‘... a genial representative of the best type of Scottish farmer. He was treasurer to, and the mainstay of, the Melton Agricultural Society, which died shortly after he did and he used to delight in paying the prize money in gold sovereigns immediately after the judging was over.’¹⁴

The Melton Cemetery is also the resting place of Mary Ann, the only daughter of Thomas and his wife, who married a Melbourne hat manufacturer named Richards, and died a few months later, on 14th December 1873, aged 39.¹⁵

In his reminiscences, Toolern pioneer JR Lidgett remarks that ‘Prominent among the earliest settlers of Toolern Vale was the late T Grant, Messrs Russell and Porter...’.¹⁶ Alexander Cameron also recalled that Grant and his wife:

‘... were well liked in the district and they took a great interest in the Presbyterian Church, both the old and the new buildings. He was a member of the Road Board, treasurer of the Melton Agricultural Society and was one of the old school of liberals. He had one son, Mr Thomas Alexander Grant.

One of my sons picked up a quartz specimen showing gold, well water worn, near the Melton creek and another one out of gravel taken from the creek, which Mr Grant senior, Mr Alexander MacIntosh and a city merchant with him came to see. Mr Grant said that he had seen gold in the creek at Toolern Vale but forgot to mark the spot and could not find the place after a flood.

¹⁰ Parish Plan, Parish of Yangardook.

¹¹ Cameron, *op cit*, p.22

¹² Application for inclusion on Government Voters Roll, 1856.

¹³ It is almost certainly prior to February 1863, as Allotment 75 remains unalienated on the plan.

¹⁴ Christopher Crisp in the Melton *Express* 2/9/1905

¹⁵ Gravestone in Melton Cemetery; Bacchus Marsh Express, 20/12/1873.

¹⁶ Robert Lidgett’s memoirs *Melton Reminiscences – Melton Express* 23-9-1905

Mr Grant went to Melbourne and became suddenly ill and passed away, being buried at the Melton cemetery. The property was later leased, Mrs Grant and her son going to Flemington to live.

Later, gaining experience on Mr Henry Beattie's property in stock breeding, Mr Grant junior later returned to take charge of the property, being successful in breeding Ayrshire cattle and in gaining a number of prizes at the Royal and other Shows.

He was vice-president of the Royal Show Committee and brought forward a motion to have a dry show which was carried.

Mr Grant married one of Mr Blackwood's daughters, took a great interest in Toolern Vale, being one of the most prominent people involved in the building of the Mechanics Institute.

Thomas and Janet Grant's only son Thomas Alexander Grant, was born in Toolern in 1859. After the deaths of Thomas and Mary Ann, Mrs Janet Grant took her son Thomas junior to live in Flemington.

During TA Grant's periods in Flemington and with Henry Beattie at *Mount Aitken Glen Elgin* was leased by Messrs Watson and Fell, and it was their farm that the *Australasian Travelling Reporter* encountered in 1876:-

'It contains 940 acres of sloping ground, a great proportion of the soil being very good and well adapted for cultivation. The present proprietors have only occupied the farm for the past four years, but in that short period they have effected great improvements and have now more acres under cultivation than anyone else in the district, This season 230 acres are under various grain crops, a great increase over last year when only 80 were cultivated. The area under wheat is 90 acres while of oats, which generally do very well on this farm, there are 80 acres. English barley cover 40 acres, and is generally found to be a profitable crop, the yield last season averaging over 25 bushels. Cape barley is also grown, as it thrives well as a rule, the return last year being 43 bushels to the acre. The system of cropping pursued is to cultivate the land one year and let it lie fallow the next allowing the stock to run over it. About 100 sheep are kept, cross bred, the Lincoln type predominating, the proprietors being gradually working into that class. Pure bred ewes from the flock of Messrs Hudson and Evans, of the Pentland hills and rams bred by Dr Chenery were introduced some time ago, and from them some superior animals have been obtained. The proprietors state that they have taken as much as 17¼ lb of wool from a sheep. About 30 head of cattle are kept, mostly stock that have been bought to fatten for market, but there are also a few superior animals kept for breeding purposes. Among these the more noticeable are a young white bull by the 17th Duke of Derrimut, purchased at Mr Morton's last sale; Lady Flora, a fine old cow, the dam of the 1st and 2nd Duke of Lancaster and a very nice white heifer by Mamaduke. A good deal of attention is paid to horses by Messrs Watson and Fell, who at the time of our visit owned 35 of these animals, of which 14 are heavy draught. It is their intention to breed a good class of weight-carriers and up-standing carriage horses, and with this in view they have purchased a powerful coaching stallion. This horse, named Scrivington is a fine four-year old by Gratis out of a Clewland mare, possessing the courage of his thoroughbred sire and the substance of the dam's breed. Among the draught stock are several promising youngsters by Muirlad and other sires out of first class mares.

The homestead is pleasantly situated on rising ground a little distance back from the road, the various outbuildings of which it is composed being very substantial and conveniently arranged. The barn is a very commodious one, built of brick with a galvanized iron roof and measures 66 feet by 23 feet, with a range of stables along one side the same length.

Attached to the residence is a garden containing an acre and a half, a great portion is well stocked with fruit trees, shrubs and flowers, the remainder being sown with lucerne which is doing remarkably well and yields a large quantity of feed, though only laid down two years.¹⁷

It was also during this period, in c.1877, that the first rabbits were seen on *Glen Elgin*; by 1884 they were in plague proportions.¹⁸

Ratebook entries suggest that TA Grant returned to the property, still rated as being of 896 acres, in 1882.¹⁹ He was certainly back living at *Glen Elgin* in 1885 when he married Mary, daughter of Melton storekeeper Alexander Blackwood at her Melton family home.²⁰

Mrs Janet Grant, described as ‘an equally notable representative of her native land’, died at Flemington on 31st December 1898, aged 79 years. She was buried from Toolern and interred with her husband and daughter at the Melton Cemetery, in 1898.²¹

Around this period TA Grant, ‘grazier’ was leasing out over half of his land, being rated on just 433 acres.²² In November 1911 auctioneers WS Keast and LA Fairbairn & Co advertised the forthcoming sale of ‘TA Grant’s famous *Glen Elgin* Estate.’²³ The property, of 902 acres, was to be firstly offered for sale as a whole, and then if necessary in four allotments:-

‘Lot 1: Containing 122 acres 2 roods 21 perches situated on the main road and adjoining Mr Hugh Campbell’s well known *Toolern Park*.

Lot 2 Containing 188 acres 8 roods and 18 perches also situated on the main road. Both lots are securely fenced and easily accessible, the frontage to each being over half a mile to the main road.

Lot 3 containing 140 acres, also adjoining *Toolern Park* and having a road frontage of about half a mile on the west side [Coburns Road]. (Lot well fenced and watered also well sheltered).

Lot 4, the Homestead block, containing 500 acres and having one mile frontage to the main road, and consisting rich undulating agricultural land, heavily grassed and well watered, portion being under lucerne and other crops. Very comfortable homestead and other buildings on this lot, consisting of a weatherboard house containing 10 rooms, water laid on, plantations and 7 acre orchard; large brick barn, stabling, shearing shed, cart shed, cow stables, yards, silo and other outbuildings.’

¹⁷ *The Australasian*, 25/11/1876

¹⁸ *Robert Lidgett*

¹⁹ Shire of Melton, Ratebooks, 1871-1888.

²⁰ *The Express*, 19/9/1885.

²¹ Christopher Crisp in the *Melton Express*, 2/9/1905

²² Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1900-1902

²³ *The Melton Express*, 11/11/1911

The agents described the property as ‘well known throughout the Commonwealth as the home of the famous *Glen Elgin* champion herd of Ayreshire Cattle, which, for constitution, size, and commercial value, have found no equal.’

Up to 700 acres of the property had been cultivated, and it was subdivided into 20 ‘sheep proof’ paddocks and watered by dams and permanent springs.

The agents described the property as ‘one of the best and most picturesque farms in the State.’ ‘Magnificent views of the city and Geelong and surrounding districts are commanded from the property, and the climate is unequalled’ said the advertisement. It would suit ‘those in search of tip-top land and gentleman’s home combined.’²⁴

The property was not sold until 1914, to AG Tedcastle, of Albert Park, who had married Mary, the youngest of the Grants four daughters. Alexander Tedcastle enlisted for service in the First World War and was overseas for four years. He and wife Mary made *Glen Elgin* their home on his return in 1920.²⁵ Tedcastle ran sheep with dairy cattle, and had draught horses and hacks. The 1926 ratebook indicates that in February of that year the property was sold to Charles L Wilcox, then Clive Mansfield and WB Boyd.²⁶

By the early early 1930s (and probably from 1926) the property was in the possession of (First World War military officer, whose wife was the daughter of Dr Boyd, from Melbourne. One daughter boarded at a private school, and the family did not engage in local activities. The tennis court and in-ground swimming pool at the homestead were constructed during the Sandersons’ occupancy.

Sanderson operated the property as a dairy himself, and on a share-farming basis, having acquired Alf Chapman’s property in addition to original *Glen Elgin* acreage. The property supported sheep grazing, dairy cattle and hay making. There was an area under crop during this period, and contract ploughing was undertaken on the property by Hugh Barrie and Bill Hunter of Melton.

Sanderson purchased a smaller property at Berwick. The next owner is thought to have been Mr Little, who carried on share farming – hay making, cropping.²⁷ It later passed to the Bert Storey, dairy farmer, who altered the homestead and the shearing shed, and then Gary Downes and family who ran dairy cattle and sheep, and also gave some acreage over to hay making. A riding school was also established on the property by the Downes family.

The original homestead, a large weatherboard building, was retained for many years, becoming home to a succession of dairy and cropping farmers who leased or share-farmed parts of the property. Alec McPherson was one of these, and her wife was visited regularly by Mrs Tarleton and her young daughter Mrs Mary Tolhurst. It was later occupied by Parker and Chisholm families, workmen on property.

After the sale of the property TA and Mary Grant had retired to Newtown, Geelong.²⁸ He died in 1927, she in 1935, and their obituaries fill in some of their life at *Glen Elgin* and in the Toolern Vale community.

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ J Bilszta, interview with Mary Tolhurst.

²⁶ Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1925-26 (notation dated 15/2/1926)

²⁷ Tolhurst, *op cit*.

²⁸ Cameron, *op cit*, pp.22-23

The *Express* noted that TA Grant, familiarly called ‘Tom’, had been a noted breeder of Ayrshires, and that the *Glen Elgin* breed was known throughout most Australian states. Tom was ‘a cultured gentleman and a splendid man’. A longer version recounts the death of Grant at Noble Street, Geelong on the 28th June, removed a long-time resident who had:

‘... assisted to do so much of a public nature or the benefit of present and future generations that will serve to keep his memory green for long years to come. The late Mr Grant was the owner of *Glen Elgin*, a picturesque property on the volcanic hillside overlooking the valley of Toolern Vale, which was acquired by his father, an early pioneer, in the fifties of the last century. He was known far and wide as a successful breeder of high class Ayrshire cattle, and built up a valuable herd which he dispersed sometime prior to the selling of *Glen Elgin* about 15 years ago. But it is by his many public services to the district that he is best remembered here. When the Toolern Vale Mechanics Institute was built 44 years ago, Mr Grant was one of the foremost spirits of the ardent band that successfully carried out what was at the time, and would be even today a gigantic venture. The hall and library cost several hundred pounds to build and furnish and Mr Grant gave all his energy and much valuable time, to help raise the necessary funds. With others, he journeyed to neighboring towns, and held entertainments for that purpose and so it was not many years before the Institute was handed over to the residents clear of debt. Together with a well-stocked library entirely free to all that resided in the district. Although the Hall has always been used for dancing and other forms of entertainment, the object for which it was intended, and which grant had most in mind, was that the young folk, after leaving school might have the advantage of attending lectures and joining debating societies, etc. Thereby further educating and fitting them for citizenship in after years, and giving the brighter ones a taste for public life. Mr Grant always took a leading part in work of his nature, arranging lectures, readings, and debates and encouraging the young people to give their views on the subject under discussion and whenever a youth gave promise of being able to ‘say his say’, and hold his own in friendly contest, no one felt prouder than Mr Grant or was freer with praise and hearty congratulations. Such unselfish work was its own reward, and, in years after, Mr Grant often had the pleasure of seeing those whom he first taught the rudiments of public speaking taking a leading part in public matters and carrying on the good work he had so ably commenced.

For the part he took in building the Mechanics Institute, and the unfailing interest he displayed in its management, he was made a Trustee for life, which office, of course, held until the time of his death. Many times after he went to reside in Geelong, he came back to give advice and assist in solving problems connected with the Institute. When Mr Grant sold *Glen Elgin* and left the district, the occasion was marked by the presentation of an address, on which was inscribed a record of his various public services. This was presented at a farewell entertainment, attended by practically every resident. When Mr Grant left the district he carried the good wishes and lasting friendship of all his numerous acquaintances, and, in rerun, he never forgot the neighbours of his life’s best years, and was always pleased to hear from them, especially from those with whom he had been closely associated in public life. The late Mr Grant was a man of sterling character and broad outlet. He was unselfish to a degree, and, possessing far more than the average ability was ever ready to give of his best for the services of others. Few districts have had the advantage of possessing a resident like him, By his public service Toolern Vale gained much in the days gone by.’²⁹

In 1935 the *Express* recorded the death at Geelong of Mrs TA Grant, late of *Glen Elgin*:

²⁹ The Melton *Express*, 29/6/1927

Mrs Grant was a native of Melton and lived here until her marriage. She was the fourth daughter of Alexander Blackwood, one of the pioneers of Melton whose family was well known and respected. Mrs Grant always worked for the advancement of the district especially the Presbyterian Church. Her late husband was well known throughout the Commonwealth as a successful breeder and exhibitor of Ayrshire cattle. Mrs Grant was laid to rest in the Melton cemetery. She is survived by four daughters.³⁰

The old three-stand timber framed shearing shed (without yards) has been the setting for numerous films and television scenes, including Five Mile Creek.³¹

The Homestead and Outbuildings

The ratebooks are little help in ascertaining the date of construction of the original homestead (no longer extant), as information about buildings appears first in 1888.³² It may have dated to or close to the time of Grant's taking up the land in 1855. The 1876 *Australasian* report remarks on a 'pleasantly situated' 'homestead' on the land, which indicates that a good sized homestead was established by this time. The present brick 'barn' and 'stables' was built by this time. The valuation of the property jumped nearly 30% in 1888, which may have been partly due to a Shire revaluation, and partly due to improvements on the property, perhaps including the house.³³ The possibility of major improvements to the original homestead, or even its rebuilding, around this time might be supported by our knowledge that a new generation of the family occupied the property anew in the early 1880s, and that TA Grant married in the mid 1880s.

However the 'original' house was situated a few hundred metres south-west of the present house.³⁴ This explains the mature exotic trees, of popular early species, that are situated in this vicinity.

It is probably less likely that TA Grant built a new house in the latter part of his stay at *Glen Elgin*. Ratebooks appear to confirm this. For the period 1907-1910, when he was again rated on the whole property of 896 acres, its valuation (NAV £273) was virtually unchanged from that of 1888 (£262).³⁵

It is thought that the present two storey homestead was erected, and the garden and orchard extensively redeveloped, during Tedcastle's occupancy from c.1920-25.³⁶ The appreciable increase in the valuation of the property 1920-22 might confirm this, however, with an existing house on the site, inconsistent listings of 'buildings', and the leasing out of parts of the site, Shire ratebooks do not provide a clear confirmation of new buildings, or improvements in the period.³⁷ In addition, the slightly different locations of the homestead shown on the 1916 and 1938 maps are not a guide to the date of a new house, as they show the original house to the north of the current house; this is likely an inaccuracy due the scale of the maps.³⁸

³⁰ The Melton *Express*, 29/6/1935

³¹ Downes, *op cit*

³² Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1871-1890

³³ Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1882-1888

³⁴ J Bilzsta, interviews with Jean McPherson Arnold, the Swan family, Lorraine Gillespie, and Mary Tolhurst.

³⁵ Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1888-1910

³⁶ J Bilzsta, personal conversation, Mary Tolhurst.

³⁷ Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1915-1930.

³⁸ Army Ordnance Maps 'Sunbury', 1916, 1938

However the house was clearly well-established, and in need of alteration to the taste of the new owner Clive Sanderson, during the 1930s depression. Sanderson employed father and son carpenters Arthur Londsedale (senior and junior) to make alterations to the homestead at this time.³⁹ Bert Storey also undertook alterations to the house after the Second World War (probably c.1950s/60s).⁴⁰

There were many other outbuildings associated with dairying, and large poultry sheds (TA Grant bred exotic poultry which he exhibited at the Royal and local shows). The entrance to the ‘old’ homestead was located south of present access road, along the boundary of Campbell estate. The stone track for horse and buggy is said to be still visible in parts.⁴¹ (Parts of a cobbled track are visible on the present main approach to the house, north of these tracks). In addition there were the stables, shearing sheds, sheep dips, and cattle yards that remain on the site.

The Rubble Stone Buildings

Either three or four Italian prisoners of war (POW) were allocated to Clive Sanderson at *Glen Elgin* in approximately 1944. They were seen in the locality walking to the Toolern store without supervision, causing concern amongst some locals.⁴² On *Glen Elgin* farm their tasks are known to have included dam construction, building a causeway across the gully on the main entrance drive, and fencing. This work on construction or property maintenance, rather than simply pure farm work, would fit the local belief that they built the three rubble sandstone buildings on the property. Mary Tolhurst, who was a visitor to the property about this time, believes that the POWs built and lived one of the cottages.⁴³

Alan Fitzgerald’s history of the ‘Farming Soldiers’ give the background to their employment on *Glen Elgin*.⁴⁴ After the rout of 150,000 of Mussolini’s troops by the Western Desert Forces in Egypt and Libya in 1941, in which the 2nd AIF played a leading role, the care of vast number of prisoners became a problem for Britain and her allies. Australia held nearly 18,500 Italian POWs from May 1941 until December 1947 when the last of them was repatriated to Italy (delays caused by the shortage of shipping). As a result of a severe shortage of manpower, in 1943 the government instigated a scheme to allow suitable Italian prisoners (not including the minority of avowed fascists) to work on farms without guards. Fearing resentment from provincial Australia, and particularly those with family fighting the Italians, the only public information about the scheme was the Prime Minister’s announcement of its inauguration. The Australian government censored all media about the scheme, which may have contributed to its low profile in subsequent years (redressed a little in the 1999 film *15 Amore*⁴⁵). However the scheme was popular amongst farmers, and successful.

The prisoners greatly appreciated their new freedom, and the opportunity to live in a family environment. They were usually treated with kindness and invariably won the respect, even

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ Mary Tolhurst, interviews with J Bilszta, various dates.

⁴² Mary Tolhurst, personal conversation, 24/2/2006; Downes, *op cit*.

⁴³ Tolhurst, 24/2/2006, *op cit*.

⁴⁴ Fitzgerald, Alan, *The Italian Farming Soldiers: Prisoners of War in Australia 1941-1947* (MUP, Carlton, 1981), *passim*. Unless otherwise stated, this is the source of all the information about this scheme.

⁴⁵ Elkner, C, Martinuzzi O’Brien, I, Rondo, G, Cappello, A, *Enemy Aliens* (Connor court, Bacchus Marsh, 2005), p.iv

esteem, of their hosts. Despite language difficulties, many farming families and prisoners became friends. Their fondness for children was something that was particularly noted by many hosts. They took every opportunity to ‘spoil’ the children with sweets and some helped mothers in looking after and raising the children. Many were from rural backgrounds, and they are generally remembered as willing workers, and cheerful and entertaining companions. They were fond of music: Italian folk and opera music - solos, harmonies and choruses - pealed around Australian landscapes.

The men were not supposed to go into any town or shop or house other than that of their employer, although such regulations were often breached with the connivance of grateful farmers and friendly locals.

Typically, the men were put to work on the farm. In between the milking on dairy farms they were given jobs about the maintenance of the farm, fencing, repairing buildings and the like. Inevitably their numbers included skilled and partly skilled workmen. The oral history record of the experiences of the farmers and prisoners includes the story of ‘Antonio’, ‘who built himself a hut of stone and cement which he called home.’⁴⁶

The sedimentary stone cottages on *Glen Elgin* appear different in construction from other buildings in the municipality. They are built of quarried, arrised, sandstone, of regular sizes, laid in a consistent manner. Their random pattern, quarried stone, and light colour gives the buildings an appearance closer to a European alpine lodge than a typical Melton stone cottage. There is nothing quite like them in Melton.

The building closest to the house is a shed, without windows or chimney. The cottage to its west is a larger building which includes a window and a brick chimney at its end. The cottage further west again is larger, double-fronted, with a rubble stone chimney placed in an unusual position in the centre of the building, opposite the front door rather than, as traditionally, on one of the gable ends of the cottage. The age and location of the Bhutan cypress trees near one of the cottages suggests a relationship between the two.

The buildings appear to have been professionally built, with their walls and general construction apparently in very good condition. However the largest of the cottages appears to have been neglected, and is now losing its corrugated iron roof.

Glen Elgin was identified as a place of heritage significance by the local community in the Community Workshop held as part of this Stage One Study on 7th September 2001.

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.’⁴⁷ 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

⁴⁶ *ibid*, pp.30, 36, 101

⁴⁷ Cannon, Michael, *Life in the Country: Australia in the Victorian Age: 2* (Nelson, West Melbourne, 1978), p.149

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.⁴⁸ 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 English farmers since at least the early nineteenth century.⁴⁹ 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), Mount Ida (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.’⁵⁰

In 1885 *Martins Home and Farm* described uncovered underground tanks and wells as ‘the family rat-trap’.⁵¹ ‘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

⁴⁸ Hughes, Trueman, Ludlow, ‘Wells and Underground Tanks’, prepared for the Heritage Council of NSW (nd), *passim*; Cannon, *op cit*, p.150

⁴⁹ J.C. Loudon, *Encyclopaedia of Agriculture*, Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman, London, 1826.

⁵⁰ Cannon, *op cit*, p.151

⁵¹ Cited in Hughes *et al*, *op cit*, p.19.

towns Efficient disposal of human excreta was a major problem.⁵² The connection between water pollution and public health, in particular diseases like dysentery, typhoid and even cholera were beginning to be appreciated.⁵³

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.⁵⁴ 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.

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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷

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.’⁵⁸ 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.*’⁵⁹ 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.*’⁶⁰ 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

⁵² Cannon, *op cit*, pp.255-6

⁵³ Hughes *et al*, *op cit*, pp.19-24

⁵⁴ *ibid*, pp.32-33

⁵⁵ Eg, Albrecht, CE, *Measurements and Dimensions of Tanks and Dams* (Melbourne, Arnell and Jackson [1885?]), pp.30-33

⁵⁶ 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).

⁵⁷ Hughes *et al*, *op cit*, pp.32-80.

⁵⁸ Hughes *et al*, *op cit*. (Austral Archaeology also conducted a study of early Chinese wells on the Koorong, South Australia.)

⁵⁹ Lewis, Miles, *Physical Investigation of a Building: National Trust Technical Bulletin 9.1* (National Trust of Australia, Victoria, 1989).

⁶⁰ Hjorth, Anders, ‘Recollections of Melton 1861-67’, in M&DHS Newsletter, February 2001.

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.⁶¹ 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 most likely that the tank was built c.1850s.

Tankbuilders known to have operated in Melton 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).⁶²

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Shire of Melton Historical Themes: 'Pastoralism', 'Farming', 'Horses, Hounds and Hares'.

Comparable Places in Shire of Melton:

Historically, *Glen Elgin* is comparable to the few other other nineteenth century large farms / small grazing properties in the Melton Shire, including *Melton Park* (Place No.008), the Moylans' *Mount Kororoit Farm* (Place No.146), the Beatys' *Pinewood* (Place No.059), *Glencoe* (Place No.005), *Rocklands* on Townsings Road (Place No.133), and *Strathtulloh* (Place No.286). Other smaller farms include *Rocklands* on Hopkins Road (Place No.391).

Architecturally, *Glen Elgin*, 766-858 Gisborne-Melton Road Toolern Vale, is a representative (although contextually substantial) example of a large nineteenth and early twentieth century farm complex in the Melton Shire. Other comparable examples include:

- House & Outbuildings, 63 Griegs Road (Place No.372). The main house is considerably more intact than at *Glen Elgin*. The outbuildings at 63 Griegs Road are of Federation design, and the whole complex is therefore completely representative of farming in the Federation era. This property does not feature the range of outbuildings and subsequent developments as *Glen Elgin*.
- Mt Cotterell Homestead, 153 Faulkners Road, Rockbank (Place No.360). A moderately intact early twentieth century farm complex, the main house is an altered Victorian vernacular styled building with nearby twentieth century machinery shed, stables, underground tank with rivetted ship tank above and remnants of a shearing shed. The degree of alteration of the main house may be comparable with *Glen Elgin*, although this latter property has a larger number of buildings that appear to be more substantial and intact.

⁶¹ Hughes *et al*, *op cit*, p.3

⁶² Robinson, *op cit*; also Tom Collins memoirs, part of which were reproduced in the M&DSH Newsletter of December 2000.

- Small Farm Complex, 845 Griegs Road, Rockbank (Place No.374). This property is comprised of a moderately intact early twentieth century vernacular styled farm house and outbuilding. The farm house is not as substantial as the dwelling at Glen Elgin (even in its altered state) and the property does not feature the extent of outbuildings as Glen Elgin.

Condition:

- Main House – good
- Brick Stables – good
- Open Timber Shed – poor
- Shearing Shed – fair
- Small Stone Cottage – good
- Larger Stone Cottage – fair-poor
- Small Stone Shed - good

Integrity:

- Overall complex – substantially intact
- Main House – altered (moderate-low)
- Brick Stables – substantially intact
- Open Timber Shed – substantially intact
- Shearing Shed – substantially intact
- Small Stone Cottage – substantially intact
- Larger Stone Cottage – moderate integrity
- Small Stone Shed – good.

Recommendations:

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

External Paint Controls:	<i>Yes – brick stables and stone cottages and shed</i>
Internal Alteration Controls:	<i>No</i>
Tree Controls:	<i>Yes – Monterey cypresses along the drive, conifers & palm in main house garden, the Algerian Oaks, Bunya Bunya Pine, Osage Orange, and English Elms.</i>
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	<i>Yes – brick barn / stables, open timber shed, two stone cottages and shed, stone-lined underground tank with gabled roof, shearing shed.</i>



c.1944 Italian POW-built cottage and a Bhutan cypress.



Algerian Oak and Bunya Bunya Pine



Monterey Pines and modern Dry Stone Wall bordering the Homestead Garden.