

Heritage Overlay No.: 032
Citation No.: 041
Place: Hjorth’s Farm, 163 Hjorths Road

Other Names of Place: Anders Hjorth’s ‘New Thrustrup’ Farm
Location: 163 Hjorths Road (Allot. 59B, Parish of Yangardook), and 163 Hjorths Road, (Allot. 59H, Parish of Yangardook), Toolern Vale
Critical Dates: 1867 (establishment of property); c.1870s (construction of dam and terraces)
Existing Heritage Listings: ‘Place of Interest’ (Rural Heritage Study, Western Region of Melbourne)¹
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

Hjorth Farm, at 163 Hjorth Road Toolern Vale is significant as a substantial, evocative, and rare example of early intensive farming in the Shire, as a result of the Selection Acts, and the skills of Danish immigrant Anders Hjorth. Although the house and outbuildings have been demolished, the stone wall dam, terraces and other evidence of the irrigation system constitute significant evidence of an unusual, creative and well-known farm in the district.

¹ Johnston, Chris, *Rural Heritage Study, Western Region of Melbourne* (Context, Melbourne Western Region Inc, 1994), p.34

Hjorth Farm, at 163 Hjorth Road Toolern Vale is aesthetically significant at a local level (AHC D2). It includes a unique example of an early sedimentary stone dam in the Shire; it is also a unique example in the Shire of a dam used for horticultural purposes. Erected single-handedly across a gully over several years, the reservoir is a solid structure with a vertical wall several metres high, of mortared sedimentary stone and brick, founded on solid stone, and holding a wide earth wall which is also a track. Although subject to minor repairs in terms of introduced brickwork and mortar, the dam has a high degree of integrity.

Hjorth Farm, at 163 Hjorth Road Toolern Vale is historically significant at a local level (AHC A4, B2). It is demonstrative both of the important part played by Selection Acts in enabling labourers to access small farms, and of the intensive farming skills of a European immigrant to make a success of a small farm in land of generally low production value. Through his interest and skills in intensive farming Hjorth was able to transform a small acreage of the 'barren scrubby ranges' beside the Djerriwarrh Creek into a successful dairy and horticultural farm. The property is of historical interest for its demonstration of some of Hjorth's innovative adaptation of European small farming traditions to unpromising local country, sometimes in the face of scepticism by neighbours. His irrigated terraces enabled him to grow a good selection of fruit trees, and provided quantities of lush green feed and vegetables, as well as preventing soil loss in wet weather. He also built a cow shed, and experimented with grasses suitable to the dry climate of Australia. Anders Hjorth lived to a great age, and was a noteworthy person in the Melton community in his time. A son, Ralph Hjorth MP represented the local area in the Victorian Parliament.

Hjorth Farm, at 163 Hjorth Road Toolern Vale is scientifically significant at a local level (AHC C2). It has at least two sets of terraces, with low sedimentary stone walls, upon which is the remnant of an orchard. Agricultural pipes, landforms and other evidence also remain from Hjorth irrigation system. These, and the remnant landforms and other detritus have the potential to contribute new information to our understanding of early farming in Melton Shire, especially in relation to the adaptation of European traditions to local conditions. Similarly, any evidence of the butter cellar would have potential to contribute to this understanding.

Hjorth Farm, at 163 Hjorth Road Toolern Vale is socially significant at a local level (AHC G1). It was identified as a place of local heritage significance in Community Forum held as part of this heritage study. Anders Hjorth is of continuing significance to the the Melton community as a consequence of his historical memoir: 'Recollections of Melton 1861-1867', through which a great deal of the early history of Melton is known today.

Overall, Hjorth Farm, at 163 Hjorth Road Toolern Vale is of LOCAL heritage significance.

Description:

163 Hjorth Road is situated at the end of Hjorth Road Toolern Vale, on the east side of Djerriwarrh Creek (Crown Allotments 59B and 59 H, Parish Yangardook).

The place is part of the former Hjorth farm and orchard, near Djerriwarrh Creek. The house and outbuildings have been demolished. A stone-lined butter cellar next to the site of the house was there in 1994 and may still survive although it was not sighted. Evidence of this would contribute to the significance of the place.

In 1994 the former orchard and irrigation system established by Anders Hjorth was described as:-

‘An extant system of three stone-faced dams built by Anders Hjorth c.1877 along a natural watercourse. Gravity and hessian pipes were used to transfer water between the dams and to water stock, vegetable garden and orchard. Stone-lined butter cellar next to the site of the house appears to be the same vintage.’²

This information was obtained from informants rather than first-hand site survey at the time.

There is one small mortared stone dam on site at present. The wall is constructed vertically of sandstone, no doubt the local ‘schistose’ rock. The wall is curved, and has a farm access track running across the top. A few courses of machine-made brick have been added to the top of the dam wall, probably in the twentieth century.

Close by, to the north and west of this dam, are at least two sets (each c.9 metres long) of low terraces, some of which are supported by sedimentary stone walls c.700 mm in height. Apple, plum, pear and other fruit trees (including an almond or peach tree), together with rose bushes, survive on these terraces. The remains of an agricultural clay pipeline runs below the terraces, parallel with the original stream channel.

A slightly larger dam with an earthen embankment is situated immediately above the stone walled dam.

Detailed investigation is likely to reveal further evidence of channels and the original irrigation scheme.

There the remains of some mid twentieth century weatherboard stables, likely associated with the conversion of the property into the ‘Huntly Park Stud’ in the mid twentieth century.

Remnants of handmade bricks from Hjorth chimney & stone dairy removed by the Woods’ to *Norwood* (Place No.43)

History:

Anders Hjorth was born in Lindenberg, Denmark, 1837, into a family associated with mercantile shipping although his father was a landholder.³ He went to sea as a youth, sailing as a second mate with his elder brother on the Europe - South America run. In 1857 he sailed from London to Adelaide where he disembarked, worked among German settlers around Adelaide and travelled overland to the Victorian goldfields where he had no luck. He left for America arriving there in 1858. Sailing back to Australia in 1860, he left his ship to work for farmers for some months before again sailing for England. In March 1861 he came back to Australia, this time, for good. Making his way across country from Melbourne to Geelong, he met an Irish born farmer-contractor in the area of Mount Kororoit whose father had fought at Waterloo. Hjorth was offered work fencing the Melton cemetery. Two years later he married Anne Devanny, the farmer’s daughter, and settled in the Melton district. Ann Devanny was

² Johnston, *op cit*, p.176 (citing M&DHS)

³ Unless otherwise cited, historical material relating to Hjorth has been compiled from material supplied by Evelyn Allen and her son, Victor Allen (Hjorth’s great grandson). Evelyn Allen also made available an enlarged photograph of the property showing the house facing Davey’s Hill to the east, the dairy and garden. Some of this information derives ultimately to a privately published biography of Hjorth written by a nephew prior to his death.

born in Cumnock, Ayrshire, Scotland, and arrived with her parents and sister in 1852. A brother died on the voyage.

The couple lived in a tent on the Toolern Creek for two years growing vegetables and tobacco to supplement income earned as a labourer, woodcutting, splitting and fencing. Hjorth later described this life, and the reason for his movement to the Djerriwarrh Creek in 1867, in an historical memoir:

‘I had married in 1862, and the first domicile my wife and I had was a tent, erected at the end of a road which terminated quite abruptly at the Melton Creek, about a mile north of the village. Living in tents before getting any settled abode was quite common in those days. The two years preceding our settling here, I had been working for farmers in the locality. Being fond of gardening, I here on a small plot, successfully grew [sic] vegetables. When the season was anything favourable I also grew tobacco, erected a small shed, dried and cured the leaf, and sold it in Melbourne at a remunerative price. But some seasons when I wanted water for my plants there was none in the creek. At other times again the creek would come down in a big flood, surrounding the tent. We had on two occasions to leave it in the middle of the night, and seek safety living with a neighbour living on higher ground. Therefore, in 1867, we made up our minds to remove to a place where we would be safer from floods, and where there was always an abundance of water and firewood. Thus we came to my present abode, in the forest on the Djerriwarrh Creek, west of Toolern Vale.’⁴

The country in which the Hjorth dam and orchard is situated was described in the earliest maps of the area as ‘barren ranges’, ‘barren scrubby ranges’, and ‘barren schistose hills’.⁵ Nevertheless, squatter Hyde of the Greenhills pastoral station, had between 1839 and 1842 moved westwards to establish an outstation in this country, approximately 1 kilometre north of the Hjorth property.⁶

Hjorth firstly erected a rough hut, and later a substantial timber cottage, named ‘New Thrustrup’ in remembrance of his old Danish home. An underground tank was excavated and lined with stone, a stable and a barn soon followed. He cleared the forest; after felling, small trees were pulled together to enclose paddocks. Hjorth kept cows and made butter, which was kept in a dairy. Improvements to the dairy, which for the sake of keeping cool was constructed halfway underground, became necessary.

Finding that his original design caused much dampness, which had a deleterious effect on the cream, another dairy was built on higher ground. This was provided with a double roof of iron with a ‘shingle sandwich’. This was successful in keeping the cream cooler and improving the condition of the butter. Better prices were achieved as a result.

As butter did not keep well in hot weather a weekly dispatch of that product was considered very desirable by local farmers. Anders Hjorth took up butter dealing. Every Wednesday and Thursday he left home to collect neighbours’ butter and eggs and leave the goods ordered the week before by those who requested he make the necessary purchase in Melbourne. Butter boxes – in mostly half pound prints - were covered in wet bags which kept butter firm. For

⁴ Anders Hjorth, ‘Recollections of Melton 1861-1867’, in M&DHS Newsheets, February and April, 2001.

⁵ Lands Victoria, Historical Plan: ‘Roll Plan 113 (10/9/1839); SLV: T Bibbs ‘Co of Bourke’ (1855); Lands Victoria, Historical Plan: ‘Sydney H3’ (28/6/1842)

⁶ *ibid*

twenty years Hjorth drove a one horse tilt wagon to the Melbourne once a week to sell butter and eggs for local farmers and bring back goods for his customers. He left before dawn, returning in the evening. In due course he obtained a hawker's licence for his dealing activities.⁷

To increase his own herd's milk yield Anders Hjorth built, after Danish custom, a cowshed for his eight to ten cows - something almost unheard of in a land where cows were kept out during the whole year. This created much derision until farmers saw the results.

He improved the property by erecting a reservoir across the creek single-handedly. Construction of reservoir's solid wall, several metres in height built of rough stone laid in mortar was favoured by the careful selection of the site – rock across a gully with a solid stone base. It took several years to construct and was known as 'The Dane's Folly' in the local neighbourhood. However it proved its worth by providing a water supply and limited irrigation using clay pies and calico hoses was introduced.

He was a believer in intensive agriculture and for years tried to introduce grasses suitable for the dry climate of Australia, more especially on the land he had selected which was not of high production value. He increased his holding from 20 to 114 acres. He was a keen gardener and had good selection of fruit trees planted on terraces to prevent soil loss in wet weather and to permit watering all year. The terraces also provided quantities of lush green feed and vegetables.

Post and rail fencing was changed to post and wire netting around the garden and orchard to provide protection from rabbits. He had a fine selection of roses and took many prizes at local Agricultural and Horticultural shows

Hjorth had taken up his small parcels of forest land under the Selection Acts. Parish Plans, and the oldest surviving Shire ratebooks show the first allotments occupied by Anders Hjorth 'farmer', were No. 59B (on which he established his farm, of 20 acres), and No.59F, also of 20 acres, removed a little to the north.⁸ In 1882 Hjorth, by now described as 'dealer', was granted title to allotment No.59H, adjacent to the homestead allotment 59B. On these two allotments he built his dam and terraces.⁹ Hjorth selected a few other nearby allotments, and by 1900 the ratebooks described the final property of 'farmer' Hjorth of 'Coimadai', as being '114 acres and buildings', being Crown Allotments 59B, 59H, 59C, and 59D (20 acres acquired from a neighbouring selector).¹⁰

While Hjorth at one stage refers to a neighbour, German Mr Poppe, he appears to have been quite isolated on Djerriwarrh Creek. By 1892 selections that had been taken up to his north, by Highams, Essenhigh, Green and Gandy, were all vacant, with the exception of Essenhigh's allotment 59E, now occupied by Stevens. The only other nearby inhabitants were George Hogg's family on the Diggers Rest – Coimadai Road.¹¹

⁷ See also Olwen Ford, 'Rural Activity in Melbourne's West, 1851-1880' (Appendix 2A, Melbourne's Western Region Historical Outline, Melbourne's Living Museum of the West, Melbourne Western Region Commission, Draft Only, nd), p.2

⁸ Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1871-1872.

⁹ Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1882-1887.

¹⁰ Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1900-1919

¹¹ Shire Map Series, 'Parish of Yangardook' (1892); also Hjorth, *op cit*

By 1916 the Hjorth house is now the only house on Hjorth Road. All the other selections are uninhabited. The only other house is the stone house of the Hoggs (now demolished).¹²

Anders Hjorth was well read and a keen observer of the world about him. He contributed lengthy articles to the local paper on topical matters as well as historical data. His recollections of Melton from the mid 1860's is an invaluable source of local history data.

One of the topical issues of the day to which Hjorth was alert was the context between squatters and would-be farmers for land. He noted that Melton 'was surrounded by large pastoral estates on three sides', which acted as a check on progress of the village. He reported on the rush to Melton from as far away as South Australia when c.1865 land to the east of Melton was opened for selection.¹³ His Hjorth Road farm, acquired under the provisions of the Selection Acts, is testament to this key issue in Australia's history.

His children attended the Toolern Vale School. A son, Ralph, became Member of Parliament for Bulla.¹⁴ In 1917 a 'JC Hjorth', presumably a son, selected a property (allotment 95 B, of 52.5 acres) a little further north on Djerriwarrh Creek.¹⁵

At his death his request to be buried wrapped in the Danish flag, was complied with by his family. On his simple, minimalistic headstone in Melton Cemetery are the words: 'Anders Hjorth, died 1928, aged 92.'

In the mid twentieth century Mr Huntly converted the property to 'Huntly Park Stud', but also continued the garden.

Later, handmade bricks, remnants of from Hjorth chimney & stone dairy were removed by the Woods' to *Norwood* to save them from being lost (Place No.43).

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Melton Historical Themes: 'Water', 'Farming', 'Community'

Known comparable examples:

This is a unique remaining nineteenth dam in the Shire in that:- it was built by a horticulturalist, as part of an irrigation system; and in that it is constructed of sedimentary stone, mortared, and with a vertical face.

There were many nineteenth century 'dry stone' wall dams in the Shire. These were constructed of bluestone (mostly roughly squared, sometimes fieldstone), with battered walls, and were mostly large and professionally constructed.

Most were constructed on WJT and Sir WJ Clarke's *Rockbank* pastoral station:- the Rockbank Headstation Dam (Place No.443); the Plumpton Dam (Place No.151); the Coimadai – Diggers Rest Road (Place No.082); and the Holden Road Dam (Place No.110).

The dry stone wall dams built by farmers – larger farmer / grazier William Beaty on his *Rocklands* property (Place No.164); and small farmer James Murphy (Place No.077) – both at

¹² Army Ordnance Map: 'Sunbury' (1916); also Starr, *op cit*, p.160

¹³ Hjorth, *op cit*

¹⁴ Starr, J, *Melton: Plains of Promise* (Shire of Melton, nd., c.1985), p.187

¹⁵ Parish Plan, Parish of Yangardook

Diggers Rest, are the most comparable in terms of use. Like the others however, these dams were used for watering stock, sheep and/or dairy cattle.

There are some buildings constructed of sedimentary stone in the northern Coimadai – Toolern Vale area, such as the cottages on Glen Elgin (Place No.39), and the ‘Shepherd’s Cottage’ (Place No.61).

Condition:

Fair (overall).
Good (dam).

Integrity:

Part Substantially Intact
Part Damaged/Disturbed

Recommendations:

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

External Paint Controls:	<i>No</i>
Internal Alteration Controls:	<i>No</i>
Tree Controls:	<i>Yes: orchard trees</i>
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	<i>No</i>

Other Recommendations:

- An archaeological study of the irrigation system has significant potential to contribute to our understanding of early farming in Melton. It would be desirable for such a record to be made before this evidence is further eroded by the passage of time or site development.



Remnant terracing and orchard.



The finely constructed dam wall.



The Hjorth farm, showing house and outbuildings, and Hjorth's tilt wagon.
(Photograph courtesy of Mrs Evelyn Allen)