

Heritage Overlay No.: 036
Citation No.: 055
Place: ‘Greenhills’, 1260-1398 Diggers rest-
Coimadai Road

Other Names of Place:

Location: 1260-1398 Diggers Rest Coimadai Road, Toolern Vale. (Lot 6, LP 201866)

Critical Dates: Establishment of station: 1837; Construction of present house: c.1903 (extension 1980s).

Existing Heritage Listings: ‘Place of Interest’ (Rural Heritage Study)¹

Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

Greenhills, Toolern Vale, is significant as a predominantly intact example of a Federation style homestead built by Walter Browne in c.1903. The setting of the homestead (including outbuildings, former gardens, dams and relics of dry stone walls) also contributes to an understanding of the heritage values of the place, dating back to the pioneering era of this early pioneering Victorian pastoral property. Historically, *Greenhills* was one of the first pastoral runs, and centres of European settlement, established in the Shire of Melton.

The *Greenhills* pastoral estate, Toolern Vale, is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4, B2, H1). It was a noted early Victorian pastoral property established by John Hunter

¹ Johnston, C, *Rural Heritage Study: Western Region of Melbourne* (Melbourne Western Region Inc., 1994), p.176

Patterson, prominent pastoralist and member of the early Port Phillip community, and Victorian MLA and Treasurer in the 1850s. Patterson established the property very early in 1837, making Greenhills one of the very first pastoral runs and centres of European settlement in the Shire of Melton. It was a very large run, of some 40,000 acres extending nearly to Bacchus Marsh in the west, and the largest population centre in the present Shire of Melton recorded in 1841. The station became the basis of the road system and early settlement of the Toolern Vale district, which was initially named after the station. The property was associated with John Batman's daughters Eliza and Adelaide who married the station's Collyer brothers; with Cr A Macintosh, the first President of the Melton Roads Board; MI Browne; Cr Walter Browne JP (who built the present house); and other Victorian pioneering pastoralists including George Hyde and George Urquhart.

The *Greenhills* homestead, Toolern Vale, is architecturally significant at a Local level (AHC D.2). It demonstrates original design qualities of a Federation style. These qualities include the hipped roof forms clad in galvanised corrugated steel, and the encircling verandah featuring a gabled portico at the front. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the single storey height, timber weatherboard wall cladding, strapped brick chimneys with terra cotta pots, paired turned timber verandah posts with solid timber fretwork between, more elaborate timber fretwork valances to one side, timber verandah floor, timber framed double hung windows (including the projecting banks), decorative gable infill and the turned timber finial to the verandah portico.

The *Greenhills* pastoral estate, Toolern Vale, may be of scientific significance at a Local level (AHC C2). It appears to retain evidence of the garden enclosure of a very early pastoral homestation.

The *Greenhills* pastoral estate, Toolern Vale, is socially significant at the local level (AHC G1). It was the subject of an excursion by the Melton and District Historical Society in the late twentieth century. 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 *Greenhills* pastoral estate and homestead, Toolern Vale, is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

The property known as *Greenhills* is situated in a rural setting, and comprises a main house, of two eras, with a few exotic ornamental trees (Canary Island palm, Ghost gum, and peppercorn) at the front (east side), and a domed underground water tank; shearing shed; shearers' quarters; tennis court; and a few remnant conifers in poor condition to the north of the house. Near the Yangardook Creek downstream (south) of the house is an isolated mature oak tree near a small concrete dam wall over the creek; this is situated in a formerly fenced 'grass paddock'. A little to the north of the house are the scant remnants of what appears to have been a dry stone wall around an early fenced 'garden' on the alluvial flat. There is a small dam next to the creek in this location.

The single storey, timber weatherboard, Federation styled dwelling is characterised by hipped roof forms clad in galvanised corrugated steel, and an encircling verandah featuring a gabled portico at the front. The verandah is supported by paired turned timber posts with solid timber fretwork between. There is more elaborate timber fretwork valances to one side. An open timber balustrade defines the perimeter of the verandah, which is elevated from the ground and has a timber floor and horizontal timber base walls. The gabled portico has decorative gable infill and a turned timber finial.

At least three early strapped brick chimneys with terra cotta pots adorn the roofline. Modest overhangs with exposed timber rafters are features of the eaves.

Other early features of the design include the timber framed double hung windows (including the projecting banks).

The interior features include timbered panel walls and ceilings, original brick fireplaces some with elaborate mantles, and gas light fittings in a number of rooms. There is a brick cellar that might date to the original house.

A large late twentieth century addition to the dwelling is included as a separate south wing. It is a long double gable weatherboard structure, which incorporates the southern wing of the original c.1903 building (the kitchen), evident in an original chimney. The concrete dome of an underground tank is situated near the junction of the c.1903 and the new wing.

History:

Explorers and early settlers had passed through the area in travelling between the Geelong, Bacchus Marsh and Sunbury districts. *Green Hills* pastoral run was an early and well-known early Victorian pastoral run, and one the very first in the Shire of Melton.²

John Hunter Patterson ‘finding the country almost totally unoccupied’ established the *Green Hills* station c.January 1837. It was extensive – one outstation was situated at Bacchus Marsh.³ Prior to his death in 1859 Patterson was a Victorian MLA (1856-59) and Treasurer.⁴ The establishment of *Green Hills* created the first track to the area, from Keilor ‘To Green Hills and Bullangrook’ (Bullengarook).⁵ ‘Green Hills’ became the original name of the district and settlement that later became known as Yangardook, then Toolern, and finally Toolern Vale.

The 1841 census is one of the earliest records available in the area.⁶ Travelling north from George Greaves’ ‘Wearibi’ station (11 persons), the census recorder came first to the stations of John Watton on the Djerriwarrh Creek (soon to be Simon Staughton’s Exford run, 18 persons), William Pyke (at Melton, 5 persons) and John Aitken (at the Gap, 19 persons).⁷ The largest of the early Melton pastoral stations was the run held by ‘Simeon Cadden in charge for John Patterson’, on ‘Pennyroyal Creek’ (Yangardook, or Toolern Vale Creek), the *Green Hills* station. It which supported 26 persons (‘all free’), including 15 shepherds. Its building was of ‘wood’.⁸ (Cadden soon had the Bullengarouke run to the north on his own account.)

In 1841 Patterson was forced by the financial crisis to sell or lease all his extensive pastoral holdings. George Hyde became the occupier of *Green Hills* 1841-43.⁹ Hyde died on 1st June

² *Green Hills* at Toolern would also appear to have had an association with number of early pastoralists who established runs in the Western District, at Mount Emu near Caramut (at which there was a much larger pastoral run called *Green Hills No.1*). These include Cadden, Hyde, (and maybe Bell), and (later) possibly Urquhart. (Sayers, *Bride*, *op cit*, pp.281-282, 290-291, 289-299; Browne, *op cit*, p.172)

³ John Lack & Olwen Ford, ‘Melbourne’s Western Region: An Introductory History’ (Melbourne’s Living Museum of the West, Melbourne Western Region Commission, 1986), p.12

⁴ Starr, J, *Melton: Plains of Promise* (Melton Shire Council, nd), p.76

⁵ Land Victoria, Historical Plans: OR K7 and OR K8 (WS Urquhart, 1847); During the goldrush it became part of an alternative route to Gisborne, via the ‘Break-neck’.

⁶ *1841 Census, New South Wales* (Port Phillip District).

⁷ He is also referred to as a Doctor ‘Dr John Whatton’ (Notes, Melton District Historical Society [by Gail Chambers?]), and in Starr, *op cit*, p.87

⁸ 1841 Census, *op cit*, Return No.13

⁹ Land Victoria: Historical Plan: ‘Roll 11’ (c.1841); Starr, *op cit*, p.76

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...’¹⁰

In 1843 Patterson was insolvent. His creditors included the Clyde Company, of which John and Alexander Dennistoun, the great Glasgow pastoral agent and finance company, was a major shareholder. It is possibly as the result of a settlement with Patterson that the names J&A Dennistoun then appear on maps (1845-56) in association with *Green Hills*. The name Bell (probably WM Bell, agent for Messrs. Dennistoun & Co.) also appears in association with the 48,000 acre property during this period.¹¹ The huge property extended west nearly to Bacchus Marsh at this time.

An undated map of the Dennistoun period shows several large fenced squares marked ‘grass paddock’. One straddles Yangardook Creek; a large oak tree that remains isolated in this area today, the only apparent possible evidence of this paddock. To the north of this paddock are two smaller squares marked ‘garden’.¹² Two sparse lines of stones, and what appears to be hawthorn plants that remain in this locality today may be the remnant of these original dry stone walls and hedge fences. These paddocks and garden are still shown on a later (1892) map.¹³

Brothers William and John Collyer (or Collier) were associates of Bell and Buchanan, and appear to have leased or been managers of the property in this period. In August 1846 William married Eliza Batman, the late John Batman’s third daughter. John married her younger sister Adelaide.¹⁴ The effectively orphaned Batman daughters - ‘lively intelligent young ladies’ – had been taken in by neighbour John Aitken of *Mount Aitken* station in the 1840s, and no doubt met the Collier brothers as a consequence.¹⁵

At the time of Crown sale c.1856 George Urquhart acquired much of the former squatting estate and began purchasing up surrounding allotments that had previously been alienated by the Crown.¹⁶ Around this time the property was renamed Yangardook during this period, but was still referred to locally as *Green Hills*.

In 1861 the *Greenhills* station passed to Alexander Macintosh. In 1869 Macintosh gave notice of an ‘Extensive Clearing Out Sale’ sale over two days in June. Apart from horses, cattle, fowl, farm, dairy and laundry implements etc, there was furniture from nine bedrooms, a schoolroom, office

¹⁰*The Argus*, 14/7/1945

¹¹ Spreadborough & Anderson, *op cit*; also Clarke, M, ‘*Big’ Clarke* (Queensberry Hill Press, Melbourne, 1980), p.108; also, untitled MDHS typescript refers to “Bells and Buchanan” in the 1848 Census; Starr, *op cit*, pp.76-78

¹² Early plan of the Parish of Yangardook (L2035)

¹³ Shire Map Series (1892): Parish of Yangardook

¹⁴ Starr, *op cit*, p.78; Mr Alan Funston, personal conversation, 10/1/2002. (The Funstons were amongst the earliest settlers at the Gap, and Alan Funston’s father worked and lived on *Greenhills*.)

¹⁵ Lang, John Dunmore, *Port Phillip, or the Colony of Victoria*, (Glasgow, 1853), pp.98-99 ; also Beattie, Steward K, *The Odd Good Year: Early Scots to Port Phillip, Northern Australia, Gap, Gisborne, and Beyond* (Southward Press, Marrickville, 1999), pp. 50-61; Symonds, IW, *Bulla Bulla: An Illustrated History of the Shire of Bulla* (Spectrum, Melbourne, 1985), p.21

¹⁶ ‘Old Melton Times’, (MDHS typescript, author unknown, reproduced from the *Melton Express* 1905)

and lobby, and kitchen pantry.¹⁷ The property was purchased by Matthew Ingle Browne of Welmore near Ross, Tasmania in that year. His £10,000 mortgage was discharged in 1880.¹⁸

In 1876 the pastoral activities on the property were subject of a report by the ‘Travelling Reporter’ for the Australasian”

‘The Green Hills Estate belonging to Mr M.I. Browne is one of the most extensive properties in the district. It is five miles distant from the town of Melton, being the same distance from the Diggers Rest Railway station, the estate extending in a westerly direction to within seven miles of Bacchus Marsh.

It has been occupied by the present owner for about seven years, the whole of the land being devoted to grazing purposes. Both cattle and sheep are kept on the station and a considerable amount of attention is paid to the breeding of both classes of stock. There are about 8000 sheep, mostly merinos which are found to answer better than the long-woolled classes on this property. A trial was being made with Lincolns some few years back, and there are now a few animals of this class remaining, but it is intended for the future to breed nothing but pure merinos. At the last sheep sales in Melbourne some superior rams were purchased which were bred by Mr C. Taylor of Tasmania and also some first class rams – one from the flock of Mr G Dowling, costing 50 guineas. Some of these sheep are of a superior class and several prizes were taken by them in Melbourne. The cattle number about 300 head, a mixed herd, but Mr Browne intends to work into a pure Shorthorn strain, and has for several years been using well bred bulls of that breed. A commencement has been made with a bull bred by Mr R Dawbin, which has left some very good stock behind him. The one at present with the herd is a well bred animal called Kildour which was purchased from Mr R. Mcdougall of Keilor. A number of superior cows were also obtained about three years ago from the herd of Messrs Cobb and Co and their progeny are mostly of a high class. The estate is subdivided into several conveniently sized paddocks and it is Mr Browne’s intention to improve his pasture by sowing the whole of his land with English grasses during the next year or two. About 15 acres are generally under cultivation with hay and green crops for home use, the remainder of the land being pasture. The homestead is a very comfortable one and conveniently arranged, the various outbuildings being of a substantial description. Attached to the residence is a nice garden containing about an acre and a half, which is well stocked with a good variety of fruit trees.’¹⁹

In May 1888 (soon before his death) MI Browne disposed of the greater part of *Greenhills* estate (which by this time had increased from 5284 acres in 1871²⁰ to 7020 acres) to Melbourne solicitor William Henry Croker (a partner of Sir Samuel Gillott in the legal firm Gillott, Croker and Snowden). In 1889-90 Croker sold some 4500 acres of this land to DWH (Harvey) Patterson, grazier, sharebroker and mining company director.²¹ On it Patterson established the *Melton Park* estate in the central western part of Melton Shire.

The balance of the property, some 2500 acres, the homestead allotment,²² was retained by Matthew Ingle Browne and then his son Walter. Walter Browne, and later the ‘Browne Bros’,

¹⁷ ‘Notice’ (18/3/1869), M&DHS.

¹⁸ Indenture, 18/6/1869

¹⁹ ‘The Australasian Travelling Reporter’, 25/11/1876

²⁰ Shire of Melton, *Ratebook*, 1871

²¹ Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1895-1897. Unless otherwise cited, information for this paragraph is from documentation of Torrens Application, 26315s, PROV VPRS 460/P000 (2652).

²² Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1907-08

‘graziers’, were rated as owners of the property during the early decades of the twentieth century.²³ Cr. Browne JP, said Alex Cameron, was a ‘gentleman well thought of in Toolern Vale, ‘liberal to Church, or charity, or to anything that would benefit the district.’²⁴

The 1892 map of the Yangardook area marks Browne’s ‘woolshed’ to the east of the grass paddock shown on earlier plans. It was situated on the east side of the Yangardook Creek.²⁵ This is no longer on the *Greenhills* property; no apparent above-ground evidence of the woolshed is visible from *Greenhills* today.

It is very difficult to ascertain the date of a replacement building from ratebooks, and it is not possible to be certain in this case. However substantial increases in the Net Annual Value of the property were recorded in 1903-04, and again in 1907-08. The latter was likely associated with acquisition of land when the property passed from Walter Browne’s control to that of Browne Brothers, so it is likely that the present homestead was built c.1903.²⁶

At the turn of the century farming was resurgent and, under political, social and economic pressure, many of Melton’s large pastoral properties began to be ‘broken up’. The empires of Clarke, Staughton, and Taylor were divided into share farms or simply sold off, either to the Closer Settlement Board, or privately. Smaller pastoral estates, such as *Mount Aitken*, *Melton Park* and James Roberston’s 3800 acre Upper Keilor estate were also sold off privately or to the Soldier Settlers Board in the early twentieth century.²⁷

In August 1922 1674 acres of *Greenhills* was sold in 11 lots ranging in size from eight to 302 acres.²⁸ Local sources report that, owing to the impression that Walter Browne died of tuberculosis in 1922, all personal possessions in the *Greenhills* homestead were destroyed by fire, including leather bound photographs and photo albums, before this sale. Lot 9, the homestead block of 1,100 acres of grazing country (comprising land west of Yangardook Creek) was not offered under auction on this date, but purchased by Hubert Borbidge in 1923 for between £10 and £17 per acre.²⁹ However the ratebooks record ‘W. Browne *Merragang*, Young, NSW’ as owner in 1925, and other sources suggests that Walter Browne retained the *Greenhills* homestead allotment until 1927.³⁰ ‘The Browne Bros of Young NSW’ may have been sons of Walter.

In addition to grazing of sheep and cattle, a poultry establishment was conducted on the property by Herbert Borbidge from 1935 - 1941.³¹ Farming seems to have played a larger role in the property around this time: the *Melton Express* of 1936 carried a report of a bad injury sustained by Hubert Borbidge, 24 year old son of Hugh Borbidge, in an attempt to stop a horse team from bolting with a reaper and binder on the property. Surgeons in St Andrew’s Hospital were able to save his leg from amputation.³²

The property remained in the possession of the Borbidge family until 1983, when it was purchased by Captain John O’Connell, who put it up for sale in 1998.³³ The O’Connell Avenue subdivision was carried out and the property was put up for sale in 1998.³⁴

²³ Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1900-1925

²⁴ Cameron, Alexander, ‘Melton Memoirs’ (M&DHS), p.23

²⁵ Shire Map Series (1892): Parish of Yangardook

²⁶ Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1900-1910

²⁷ Robertson (1903): Auction Notice (Pearson Rowe Smith and Co., and JM Peck and Sons)

²⁸ Starr, *op cit*, p.78

²⁹ Mrs Lorraine Gillespie, M&DHS

³⁰ Shire of Melton, *Ratebook*, 1925; Starr, *op cit*, p.76

³¹ Sands and McDougall directory entries

³² *Melton Express* 4-1-1936

³³ Starr, *op cit*, p.78; *Melton Express*, 16/9/1998

This homestead built by Walter Browne was described in a 1998 newspaper article as being a ‘spectacular’ c.1900 weatherboard homestead, on a grand scale, whose exterior was intact. Its interior was said to feature imported timbers and fittings, cedar patterned ceilings, intricate leadlights, and elegant fireplaces. The O’Connells’ had built a ‘period extension’ to accommodate the large family; this may have been the south wing. The property was also described as having a tennis court and established gardens.³⁵

When the Melton and District Historical Society visited the site in 1971/72, there were still bricks from the original homestead to be seen. Photographs of the house taken during this excursion survive.³⁶ A cellar of the original house may also survive.³⁷ The shearing shed is no longer extant.

There are also believed to be early graves of Aboriginal people, and workers on the site who died prior to MI Browne’s purchase in 1871. These would be very difficult to identify. A grave that appears on an early map would appear to be in the location of O’Connell Avenue, no longer on the *Greenhills* property.³⁸ Another grave, which has been tended to over the years (popularly thought to be one of John Batman’s daughters, although others claim it was a governess) is also now on one of the new properties established with the subdivision of O’Connell Avenue. Similarly, remains of a cottage and sheepwash are now on one of these new properties.³⁹

Some parts of the estate are thought to be ‘natural pasture’, never having been ploughed or top-dressed.⁴⁰

Greenhills was identified by participants in the Melton Community Workshop as a place of potential heritage value in the Shire of Melton.⁴¹

The property was the location for the film ‘Sword of Honour’.

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Shire of Melton Historical Themes: ‘Pastoralism’; ‘Horses, Hounds & Hares’;

Comparable Places in Shire of Melton:

Architecturally, the main house at *Greenhills* is a representative and contextually intact example of an early twentieth century rural property with outbuildings. Other comparable examples include:

- Glen Elgin, 766 Gisborne-Melton Road, Toolern Vale (Place No.039). This property has an altered timber main house with complex roof forms and several outbuildings including

³⁴ Starr, *op cit*, p.78; *Melton Express*, 16/9/1998

³⁵ *Melton Express*, 16/9/1998

³⁶ Mrs Mary Tolhurst, personal conversation, January 2006

³⁷ Funston, *op cit*.

³⁸ Lands Victoria, Historical Plan: ‘Feature Plan 66’ (1866?)

³⁹ Shire of Melton Heritage Study, Stage One: Community Workshop, 7/9/2001; John Beaty, personal conversation, 8/5/2002

⁴⁰ Johnston, *op cit*, p.176

⁴¹ The Workshop, held in *Dunvegan* on 7th September 2001, and attended by approximately 50 people, was part of Stage One of the Melton Heritage Study.

substantial brick stables, timber open shed, and two rand rubble cottages dating from the interwar period.

- Small Farm Complex, 845 Greigs Road, Rockbank (Place No.374). This property is comprised of a moderately intact early twentiethcentury vernacular styled farm house and outbuilding.
- Mt Cotterell Homestead, 167 Faulkners Road, Mt. Cottrell (Place No.360). A moderately intact early twentieth century farm complex, the main house is an altered Victorian vernacular styled building with nearby twentiethcentury machinery shed, stables, underground tank with rivetted ship tanks above and remnants of a shearing shed. While featuring a larger number of outbuildings, the main house, given is vernacular style, is not of the same design quality as *Greenhills*.
- House & Outbuildings, 65 Hopkins Road, Truganina (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.

Historically, the property compares with the Staughtons' *Exford* and *Eynsebury* pastoral properties (Place Nos.269, 281), both of which retain their original mid and late nineteenth century and outbuildings (in various states of repair). It also compares with WJT Clarke's *Rockbank* pastoral property (Place No.428), although no homestead remains on that property. It also compares with ruins, or archaeological sites related to the early pastoral period, including those of John Aitken's *Mount Aitken* (Place No.136), WC Yuille (Place No.467, and possibly the former Rockbank Hotel, Place No.317), the former Pinkerton homestead (Place No.264) and graves (Place No.291), and the ruin on Strathulloh possibly associated with Watton's original station (Place No.283). Place Nos.34, 44, 57, 61 and 81 may also be places associated with the early pastoral industry (evidence of shepherd's huts etc).

Condition:

Good (based on documentary evidence only)

Integrity:

Moderately Intact (based on documentary evidence only)

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. Palm, eucalypt, and peppercorn trees in front of house, isolated oak tree near creek, and remnant conifers near house.</i>
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	<i>Yes. Relics of dry stone walls around former garden.</i>

Other Recommendations:

- A preliminary archaeological survey of the early garden area of the place has the potential to provide further information regarding Melton's first pastoral settlement and is desirable.



Workers' (probably shearers') quarters behind shearing shed.



Oak Tree near Yangardook Creek