

Heritage Overlay No.: 040
Citation No.: 063
Place: Plumpton Hare Enclosure

Other Names of Place: None
Location: 847 Blackhill Road, Toolern Vale
Critical Dates: c.mid 1870s.
Existing Heritage Listings: Victorian Heritage Inventory, site H7822-0146
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

The place comprises the remains of one of three original Sir WJ Clarke hare enclosures. It consists of well-built foundations of drystone walls, which once formed three sides of a large enclosure, situated around a redgum tree.

The hare enclosure site is of historical significance at the LOCAL level (AHC A4, B2). It is the most substantial surviving remnant of the three hare enclosures built by Sir WJ Clarke in Diggers Rest as part of his pioneering of the sport of greyhound coursing in Australia. There is no other known fabric surviving from this historic development of the sport at Diggers Rest, which included the establishment of the first greyhound coursing Plumpton in Australia. It is also a rare, and the most substantial, physical fabric associated with the sport of greyhound coursing remaining in the Shire of Melton, where the sport was particularly prominent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Description:

The place comprises the remains of one of three original Sir WJ Clarke stone hare enclosures.¹ It consists of very well-built foundations of drystone walls - clearly built by a professionally waller - which once formed three sides of a large enclosure. They are 1-200 m. long, situated around a redgum tree (possibly planted).

It is now situated at the back of Mr John Beaty's property on Blackhill Road.

History:

Together with fox hunting and shooting, greyhound coursing was one of the traditional recreations of a country gentleman. Melton Shire was a key location in the early development of coursing.

Sir WJ Clarke and the Birth of Greyhound Coursing

Originally there were no tracks or enclosures and the greyhounds pursued hares across country. The first officially recognised public coursing meeting held in Australia, in which hares were the game coursed, was held in 1873 on WJ Clarke's *Rupertswood* property. On the 14th of August 1874, it hosted the inaugural 'Waterloo Cup', which became the premier greyhound trophy in Australia.

On 14th May 1874 the inaugural 'St Leger Stakes', another celebrated greyhound trophy, was held in the Melton Shire, at Wallace's Paddock near Diggers Rest Railway Station. Diggers Rest had the advantages over Clarke's Sunbury paddocks of finer grass and more level terrain, so that the courses were easier to follow. Hares there were:

“plentiful, large framed and stout runners. The ground was dry and firm, good going for the 400 spectators, who were quiet and orderly. The courses were easier to predict because the hares tended to run north, striving to escape into the rough ground bordering Jacksons Creek.”²

Clarke later stated that the superior sport of the (four day) meeting 'was due to the five strong hares that had been released at Diggers Rest six years before.'³ Another advantage of Diggers Rest was the nearby railway station, which made public access to the paddocks easy: 'The special train was waiting nearby and reached Melbourne before six o'clock.'

The popular Diggers Rest soon became the premier venue of the Victorian Coursing Club (of which Clarke was President). On 1st August 1881 the Victoria Coursing Club held the Waterloo Cup in the Plumpton enclosure at Diggers Rest for the first time.⁴

In 1882 Diggers Rest would appear to have become the site of Australia's first greyhound Plumpton:

'The Waterloo Cup meeting of 1st August 1882 introduced an entirely new element into field coursing. The VCC decided to construct a Plumpton enclosure. The word Plumpton came from a village in Sussex, and WJ Clarke sent details back to

¹ John Beaty, personal conversation, 8th May 2002

² Clarke, M, *Clarke of Rupertswood 1831-1897: The Life and Times of William John Clarke First Baronet of Rupertswood*, (Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 1995), pp. 74-75

³ *ibid*, pp.74-75

⁴ *ibid*, p.157;

Australia after his visit there. The enclosed new oval was hurriedly constructed a mile west of Diggers Rest and was first used for the final two days of the Waterloo Cup. It drew a very large crowd to view the most successful meeting yet held. The innovation met with almost universal approval ... there was much less fatigue than that caused by tramping over hundreds of boulder-strewn acres to follow 20 courses in a day. In a confined space, Banner's expert slipping could be fully appreciated and the reasons leading to the judge's decisions were more apparent. The meeting ended with hearty cheers for the absent Hon. WJ Clarke...'⁵

Clarke also set aside a couple of securely fenced paddocks a few miles west of Diggers Rest for breeding hares in semi-captivity. A number could be transported to the Plumpton Oval for a coursing meeting, so that there was always plenty of game hidden among the long grass of the enclosure. For the 1883 season Will erected stands, a ladies' enclosure and other improvements, so that 'the VCC Plumpton was a much superior affair...'⁶ It was said that: 'none of the most renowned coursing grounds in England equalled the new set-up at Diggers Rest, where the best dog was sure to win.'⁷

The introduction of greyhound racing in the early 1890s caused the demise of Plumpton coursing. In 1894 the VCC closed 'the Oval'. The special fencing and other improvements were sold and Clarke's 20 year reign as the coursing king of Victoria came to an end.

The Popularity of Greyhound Coursing in Melton

Following the formation of the VCC the sport burgeoned. Perhaps influenced by the Clarke meetings, the sport remained particularly strong in Melton, and numerous new clubs were formed.

On the 6th May 1876 the Melton Coursing Club was formed at a Raglan Hotel meeting. Messrs. Browne, of *Green Hills*, and Staughton made land available for the club's use. The committee comprised HW Staughton, S Staughton, SG Staughton, and Messrs Robertson, Manning, Graham, Cecil, Browne, Turner, Watson, Johnson E & J, and H Minns. They engaged the best slipper and judge in the business: VCC's Mr Banner.⁸

The first meeting was held in June at *Exford*.⁹ Membership, local and from Melbourne, increased rapidly, but by 1879 the Club was finding it difficult to obtain nominations and the prizes were reduced. Members were asked if they would continue support at a reduced subscription.¹⁰ Distance from railway station may have been a factor in its lack of success.

For how long this club survived is not clear, but coursing regained popularity, and other clubs were established in the Shire. By 1890 one local memoir records that '*Greyhound coursing was usually held on Moylans property Mt Kororoit, or Mt Misery as it was later known. Later still, coursing was held at Melton Park, Mr Matt Carberry was the judge and Percy Cook, the Kipper [sic]*'.¹¹

⁵ *ibid*, p.110

⁶ *ibid*, p.110. (Superior to the Chirnsides' *Werribee Park* copy)

⁷ *ibid*, p.292

⁸ Pollitt, JH, *An Historical Record of Melton* (nd), p.54; also Cameron, Alex, 'Melton Memoirs', p.20

⁹ Robert Macdonald, 'A History of Melton' (typescript held by MDHS, c.1969) p.10

¹⁰ Pollitt, *op cit*, p.54

¹¹ Collins, *op cit*.

It is presumably meetings of this latter club that were photographed around 1914.¹² John Farrell, farmer, had purchased *Melton Park* from Harvey Patterson. The Melton Historical Society has an illuminated presentation entitled ‘Melton Park – Footscray District Coursing Club – Farrell Esq, of *Melton Park*, as a token of Esteem, 20/12/1913.’ Photographs in the presentation include W Minns’ ‘Black Royal’, (winner); Miss Farrell’s ‘Swift Wing’, (runner up).

The success of this Club was later put down to the plentiful hares on the Melton Plains, and the popularity of its judge Mat Carberry. A *Melton Express* article of 1962 provided an historical insight:

‘In 1910 coursing was quite a craze. Hares were plentiful on the Melton Plains and greyhounds provided a good betting outlet. However, everything depended on the integrity of the judge.

The main reason why Melton became popular for plumpton coursing was the fame of its sporting personality Mat Carberry.

The genial personality with twinkling eyes and heavy moustache was the key figure in numerous coursing meetings held picnic style at Melton Park. People came from Melton and local districts by train and horse vehicles. Few cars tackled the rough or muddy roads to the meet.

Mr Carberry, attired in riding habit, and mounted on a grey pony, would gallop with the hounds, and signal the winning dog. His rulings were never questioned.

Hares were caught beforehand in drives conducted by coursing enthusiasts. Two dogs, one labelled red and one white, were released in each heat. The judge had in his pockets red and white cloths, and would wave the appropriate one as he gave his decision from the saddle.

Well dressed womenfolk and men in bowler hats attended these coursing events which took place several times each season.’¹³

From time to time there were other coursing venues in the district. Coursing contests were held on the *Mowbray* property, now part of the Melton Golf Course. Owner Hornbuckle was a great follower of the sport, and was killed in an accident when returning from a Melton Park meeting in 1911.¹⁴ B Joengbloeds also had a coursing track (perhaps on the Sherwins Road property later developed as the Tara stud).¹⁵

Evidence of Greyhound Coursing in Melton

The remains are situated on Crown Allotment 12, Parish of Holden, a 600 acre section purchased by WJT Clarke from the Crown on 29th January 1852.¹⁶

¹² Starr, J, *Melton: Plains of Promise* (Shire of Melton, nd., c.1985), pp.201-202. They would not have been of the original Melton Coursing Club, presuming the ‘Plumpton Paddock’ citation and date of the photographs is correct.

¹³ *ibid*, pp.198-200

¹⁴ D & W Beaty, pers. conv. Lord Hopetoun is said to have attended on one occasion.

¹⁵ G Minns, pers. conv.

¹⁶ Parish Plan, Parish of Holden.

It is situated on the east side and overlooking the West Branch of the Kororoit Creek, a little south of a tributary to the property near *Pinewood*. The property is now in a back paddock of the property owned by John Beaty, at 847 Black Hill Road.

As the remains are situated about 5-6 kilometres from the Plumpton paddock it is likely that they were used for Clarke's earlier open coursing events.

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Melton Historical Themes: 'Horses, Hounds and Hares'

Known comparable examples:

No definite physical remains of any of the Melton plumptons, and in particular, of Clarke's historically important first plumpton in Australia, is known to remain. Even the location of his Plumpton is not completely certain, the most telling evidence being historical documentation: an 1892 plan shows the enclosure in the paddock in the square mile paddock on the north-west corner of Holden and Plumpton Roads.¹⁷ (The dam known as the Plumpton Dam is in the north east of this paddock.) Apart from the (historical) site of the Plumpton, only the name: 'Plumpton Road' remains.

The site of earlier coursing events is said to have been north-west of the Plumpton Dam. Here is a row of large old pines of an uncommon variety that may be a legacy of Clarke's improvements for the events, or perhaps with the later Plumpton to its south.

The little remaining evidence of at least two of Clarke's three hare enclosures appears to be the only physical evidence of the popular sport of greyhound coursing surviving in the Shire. Of these two, this is the most intact.

Condition:

Ruinous

Integrity:

Damaged/Disturbed

¹⁷ Shire Map Series, 1892, Parish of Holden (SLV 821A)

Recommendations:

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

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| External Paint Controls: | <i>No</i> |
| Internal Alteration Controls: | <i>No</i> |
| Tree Controls: | <i>Yes</i> - the old eucalyptus in the enclosure. |
| Outbuildings and/or Fences: | <i>No</i> |



The location of the enclosure, with one wall visible in the foreground.