

Heritage Overlay No.: 056
Citation No.: 120
Place: ‘Gollers Court’, 1366 Melton Highway

Other Names of Place: N/A
Location: 1366-1496 Melton Hwy, Plumpton
Critical Dates: Constructed: c.1906-11 Burnt out in 2007.
Existing Heritage Listings: None
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

Gollers Court at 1366-1496 Melton Hwy, Plumpton, is significant as an unusual example of a transitional Late Victorian/Federation styled house with concrete wall construction. Built c.1906-11, the property also has a remnant concrete tank with construction similar to the rear later skillion wing of the house. *Gollers Court* was burnt in a fire in 2008 and so is now in a ruinous state. It is also significant as a representative example of the farmhouses built as a result of the break up of the Clarke *Rockbank* estate, a watershed in the history of the Shire of Melton.

Gollers Court at 1366 Keilor-Melton Highway is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC. D.2). It demonstrates original design qualities of a transitional Late Victorian and Federation style. These qualities include the broad gambrel roof form, together with the

shallow concave verandah that projects towards the front and the skillion wing at the rear. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the single storey height, symmetrical composition, camerated concrete or reinforced concrete wall construction (including internal walls), two tapered roughcast chimneys with terra cotta pots, modest eaves, turned timber verandah posts, decorative cast iron verandah brackets, smooth-rusticated quoinwork, and the concrete window sills.

Gollers Court at 1366 Keilor-Melton Highway is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4) as one of the most distinctive, intact and prominently situated remaining examples of the many small to medium sized farm homesteads built in the Melton Shire the early twentieth century, which are expressive of both the historic ‘break-up’ of the large pastoral properties in that era, in particular the massive *Clarke Rockbank* estate, a turning point in the history of the Shire of Melton, and also of the new farming prosperity in that period. The place is also significant for its commemoration of the part of EV Goller, and other small investors/graziers who were acquired property in Melton Shire during that period.

Gollers Court at 1366 Keilor-Melton Highway is scientifically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC F.1). It illustrates a form of unusual camerated and/or reinforced concrete wall construction for a domestic building of the very early twentieth century and is of importance for contributing to an understanding of concrete technology of that era.

Overall, *Gollers Court* at 1366 Keilor-Melton Highway is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

Gollers Court, 1366-1496 Melton Hwy, Plumpton, is set on a rural allotment with grassed areas, small rudimentary plantings and mature eucalypts mainly at the rear and sides. The house has a sizeable front setback and the front is bound by a simple timber post and rail and wire fence, approximately 1200 mm high. At the rear of the house is an early shed in poor condition and a ruinous circular tank construction of concrete block with horizontal metal and vertical cement reinforcing.

The symmetrical, single storey, solid or reinforced concrete, transitional Late Victorian and Federation styled house is characterised by a broad gambrel roof form, together with a shallow concave verandah that projects towards the front. A later skillion addition is situated at the rear. These roof forms are clad in galvanised corrugated steel. Two early tapered, roughcast chimneys with terra cotta pots adorn the roofline. Modest overhangs are features of the eaves.

An early feature of the design is the front verandah. It is supported by turned timber posts and has early decorative cast iron brackets.

Other early features of the design include the projecting smooth-rusticated quoinwork at the building corners and about the window and door openings, and the concrete window sills.

Architecturally, the house’s transitional Late Victorian and Federation style suggests a construction date of c.1900-1910.

The property was extensively damaged by a fire in 2007.

History:

Contextual History

Gollers Court is situated on Section 24, Parish of Kororoit, a 620 acre allotment purchased by WJT (Big) Clarke from the Crown on 9th June 1854.¹ It had previously been part of WC Yuille's *Rockbank* pastoral run, most of which was purchased by Clarke in the Crown Land sales of the early 1850s. Clarke, reputedly the largest pastoralist in Australia in these years, had also purchased a vast area of land around Section 24 as part of his *Rockbank* estate. To the north it included most the land as far as Diggers Rest (upon which his son later established his famous Plumpton), and to the south it included the *Rockbank* head station with its massive bluestone shearing shed, which incorporated most of the southern part of the present Shire of Melton (and extending beyond it towards Werribee in parts). However, most of the land immediately to its east, and some to its west, were part of William Taylor's large *Overnewton* estate.

By the end of the nineteenth century historical changes were afoot. To add to the inherent difficulties of the pastoral industry (when all Taylor's pastoral mortgages were discharged after his death in 1903 his estate was in deficit), a new generation of farmers restlessly surveyed the vast pastoral estates surrounding them. In 1897 Sir Rupert Turner Havelock Clarke Bart, the third generation inheritor of the Clarke empire, had mused in Parliament about cutting up 40,000 acres of his estate to lease to dairy farmers. He was under some local pressure to make land available for farming, and declared he was keen not to "disappoint public expectations."² The Victorian Municipal Directory 1898 entry for Melton Shire made the first of a series of unprecedented reports on movements by big local landholders such as Rupert Clarke, Harry Werribee Staughton, and Harvey Patterson to sell and lease (often under the 'share system') large portions of their estates to small farmers and graziers.³

This 'break-up' of the large estates coincided with major developments in farming in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as new science, technologies, fertilisers, transport and markets enabled huge productivity increases. With inventions such as the Babcock separator, the development of local co-operative creameries and butter factories, and advances in refrigeration creating new export markets, dairying in particular suddenly boomed.

And so the beginning of the twentieth century marked a major new era in the history of Melton. It saw the subdivision and sale of thousands of acres of the Clarke, Taylor, and Staughton pastoral empires, and after the First World War, of smaller pastoral estates such as *Melton Park* and *Green Hills*. In 1905 the Closer Settlement Board purchased *Overnewton* and subdivided it into smaller farming allotments. Around 1905-6 Sir RTH Clarke began subdividing and disposing of the vast *Rockbank* estate (and most of *Rupertswood*, *Red Rock* and *Bolinda Vale* estates) that had been so carefully acquired and tendered by his grandfather and father.⁴ However unlike the Closer Settlement Board he does not appear to have gone to the trouble of

¹ Parish Plan, Parish of Kororoit.

² *Sunbury News*: 31/7/1897, 7/8/1897, 4/9/1897.

³ *Victorian Municipal Directory*, 1898, and following years.

⁴ Michael Clarke, '*Big*' *Clarke* (Queensberry Hill Press, Melbourne, 1980), *passim*; Sir RTH Clarke Bart. sold the vast section of the *Rockbank* Estate that lay south of the Western Highway in November 1906; it would appear that he sold the northern portion about a year earlier. (PROV VPRS 560/P0 (35850); also CT Vol.3211 Fol.642206, pertaining to an 8000 acre portion south part of this estate; and also Shire of Melton Ratebooks from 1905-06 which record local farmers as owners of parts of the *Rockbank* estate.

subdividing his original Crown parcels in order to maximise small farming on the land. Much of his land was purchased by established neighbouring farmers and smaller graziers.

History of the Place

The Shire of Melton ratebooks recorded that in 1905 an EV (Eulius Valentine) Goller, of Sunbury, variously described as ‘grazier’ and ‘investor’, had purchased two allotments totalling about 474 acres in the Holden area. This was still the case in 1910-11.⁵ But the ratebooks for the following year, 1911-12, appear to record that Goller was now the owner of 620 acres of land occupied by a John Knox, farmer of Melton, valued at £217.⁶ The record appears in incomplete and indistinct (eg regarding ownership). Whilst this was the first year that the capricious Melton rate collector resumed recording buildings on rural properties, there is no record of a house or buildings on the property. The entry for the following year, 1912-13, is much more complete, and includes considerably more detail, including the existence of a house:- ‘Knox Bros, John & Thomas, Sydenham, farmers’, were occupying tenants of Section 24, Parish of Kororoit, being ‘632 acres and house’ valued at £221, of which EC (sic) Goller, Dana Street Ballarat was the owner.⁷

The house then was definitely built by 1912, but given the typical time-lag in recording of buildings by the Melton rate collector, it was almost certainly built by at least 1911, and quite possibly (given the vicissitudes of the Melton ratebooks) considerably earlier. Although this could have been as early as 1906 (Clarke appears to have put this northern portion the *Rockbank* estate up for sale in mid-early 1905), the apparent failure to rate the property separately until c.1911-12 indicates that it is likely to have been built later in this period rather than earlier.

In addition to the ‘Holden’ (or Sydenham West) property/properties that he had purchased from Clarke from c.1905, in December 1907 Euler (sic) Valentine Goller purchased a very large parcel (c.1200 acres / 480 ha) of the Mt Cottrell portion of the *Rockbank* estate.⁸

The *Gollers Court* property was still tenanted by the Knox Brothers and owned by EV Goller in 1915, but by 1921 (then described as ‘623 acres 2 roods and 32 perches & buildings’ and valued at £218) it was occupied and owned by an AH Groth [?].⁹ By 1929-30 the property was owned by ‘farmer’ Claude Rossiter, and valued at £340.¹⁰ This was an exceptionally large increase (especially given the downwards valuations of property across the Shire in that depression year), the reason for which is not known but no doubt was partly due to substantial improvements such as sheds and fencing.

By 1930 the property was owned by John Fallon and James Patrick Fallon, graziers. In this year a Supreme Court Writ had been lodged against the Fallon brothers and this may have instigated the sale of the *Gollers Court* to the Automobile Finance Company of Australia Limited in 1932.¹¹ By 1938 John Patrick Nolan, wholesale butcher, had acquired the property and in 1957 an easement was created on the land. By 1962, Kilpara Development Pty Limited and Alfred Henry Ellis were recorded as the owners. In 1977, *Gollers Court* was acquired by

⁵ Shire of Melton Ratebooks: 1905-06; 1910-11.

⁶ Shire of Melton Ratebooks 1911-12

⁷ Shire of Melton Ratebooks 1912-13

⁸ Certificate of Title: V 3247 F 649327

⁹ Shire of Melton Ratebooks: 1913-14; 1914-15; 1914-16; 1921-22.

¹⁰ Shire of Melton Ratebooks 1929-30.

¹¹ Authentic Heritage Services Pty Ltd, ‘Gollers Court’, Preliminary Heritage Report prepared for Carole Taylor, August 1999, citing Certificates of Title, 1930-1996.

Mervyn George and Norma Landers, Donald Mervyn Landers and Carole Taylor. The property was subdivided at this time, with the house comprising Lot 1 and 211.9 hectares. A further subdivision in 1990 forming Lot 2 (including the house) reduced the original landholdings to 105.95 hectares.

Gollers Court was identified in the Western Region Rural Heritage Study as an ‘unusual and finely detailed farmhouse’.¹²

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Melton Historical Themes: ‘Pastoral’, ‘Farming’

Known Comparable Examples in Melton Shire: Historical Comparison:

The sale of the vast Clarke pastoral estate as small farms in the early twentieth century was a turning point in the history of Melton Shire. Only 24 houses and substantial sites associated with this event now remain. Of these places, heritage citations have been prepared for 11 places, including *Gollers Court*. These places are:-

Places for which heritage controls are proposed:-

Place No.438	House, <i>Bonnie Doon</i> , Rockbank (1906)
Place No.120	House, <i>Gollers Court</i> , Melton Highway Sydenham (1906-11)
Place No.372	House, 65 Hopkins Road, Truganina (c.1910)
Place No.360	House, <i>Mount Cottrell</i> Homestead, Rockbank (c.1910)
Place No.407	House, 1/6 Judd Court, Rockbank (c.1910): one of six houses on Clarke Estate reputedly by the same builder (c.1910)
Place No.237	House, 2120 Ryans Road, Melton: one of six houses on Clarke Estate reputedly by the same builder; with scarce hand-pump still attached to underground tank (c.1914)
Place No.457	House (former Casey), Water Reserve Road, Rockbank
Place No.102	House, <i>Arrunga</i> (early 20C)
Place No.075	House, 2-180 Davis Road, Diggers Rest (c.1914).
Place No.152	House, <i>Plumpton Park</i> , Diggers Rest (c.1922)
Place No.103	House (Tyquins), 932 Holden Road, Diggers Rest (1931)

Places for which heritage controls are not presently proposed:-

¹² Johnston, C, ‘Rural Heritage Study: Western Region of Melbourne’ (Melbourne Western Region Inc), 1994, pp.168-9.

Place No.084	House, 219 Diggers Rest – Coimadai Road, Diggers Rest
Place No.470	House, Beattys Road, Rockbank, much altered
Place No.401	House, <i>Fairview Park</i> , 686 Leakes Road, Rockbank (1905-08)
Place No.315	House, Beatty's Road, Rockbank (early 20C)
Place No.456	House, Water Reserve Road, Rockbank (c.1900-10, 1960s)
Place No.299	House, <i>Penlee Farm</i> , Mount Cottrell Road, Mount Cottrell
Place No.348	House, <i>Kintbury</i> , 318-386 Faulkners Road, Mount Cottrell
Place No.452	House, <i>Stoneleigh</i> , Troups Road, Tarneit
Place No.453	House, <i>Camelot Lodge</i> , 230 Troups Road, Rockbank
Place No.371	House, 405 Greigs Road, Rockbank
Place No.107	Trees, Holden Road, Diggers Rest: large avenue of cypress trees, remains of <i>Lyndhurst Lodge</i> .
Place No.095	Outbuilding, bluestone blacksmith, Finches Road, Melton; date 1913 inscribed.
Place No.344	Ruinous house near Kororoit Creek, ruinous, concrete.

Most surviving Clarke estate places are located in the centre and north of the Shire, in the Parishes of Kororoit and Holden. In the southern parishes of Derrimut and Pywheitjorrk, which were vast Clarke landholdings, only eight places survive, two of which are recommended for heritage controls.

Architectural Comparison:

Domestic Reinforced Concrete Construction: General

Of considerable interest is the concrete wall construction (both external and internal walls). The front of the house represented by the gambrel roof form, may have been constructed in camerated concrete, which is an unusual application of jump form concrete construction with inner cavities, apparently formed by removable steel cores.¹³ It is also possible that this part of the house was constructed of reinforced concrete, with the walls cast insitu.

Gollers Court appears to be an early example of domestic concrete construction in Victoria. Camerated concrete construction was developed by Henry A. Goodard and patented in 1905.¹⁴ According to Professor Miles Lewis, the first examples constructed in this way were in Ada

¹³ M. Lewis (ed.), *Two Hundred Years of Concrete in Australia*, Concrete Institute of Australia, North Sydney, 1988, p.25.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

Street, Concord, and in Tasmania in 1906. In 1910 the Camerated Concrete Land, Building and Investment Company Limited was floated.¹⁵

The engineer Edward G. Stone built a reinforced concrete house in 1910 at Iandra, N.S.W., with the external walls being hollow and the internal ones being solid.¹⁶ Two years earlier in 1908, the South Australian builder, W.C. Torode, had developed his own concrete construction system. He built a complete house of reinforced concrete at 34 Unley Road, Adelaide.¹⁷

The later rear additions at *Gollers Court* are constructed of hollow concrete blocks, with horizontal metal reinforcing (within the mortar joints) and vertical cement filler within the hollows of the blocks – the same construction as the remnant circular tank at the rear of the house. Miles Lewis states that concrete block construction was far more widespread than reinforced concrete houses, although the technology was imported.¹⁸ Most block making machines came from America, with only a few from Britain. The American Hollow Concrete Wall Co. of Port Melbourne was managed by Richard Taylor in 1905.¹⁹ Taylor was originally employed at the Fyansford Cement Works. Another manufacturer, Tyree Ltd. Of George Street, Sydney, advertised in 1908 that ‘any country builder can make his own blocks on the spot’ and were apparently the ‘cheapest line on the market.’²⁰

Other examples of buildings constructed of concrete are found in Geelong. These buildings include:

- *Grantham*, 13-15 Retreat Road, Newtown:²¹ This Californian Bungalow styled house was designed by notable Geelong architect Angus Laird in 1920-21 for Wesley B. McCann, director of the Australian Cement Company. It is highly intact and substantial in scale, and as unpainted concrete walls and front fence that match the design qualities of the house;
- Former Australian Portland Cement Limited (APCL) Head Office, McCurdy Road, Fyansford:²² The interwar Georgian Revival styled office building was constructed in 1923 and was a reflection of the new direction and expansion of the Australian Portland Cement company at that time. The building is highly intact and features ribbed concrete wall construction;
- *Green Gables*, 65 Mount Pleasant Road, Belmont:²³ Built in 1927-28, this substantial interwar Bungalow styled house is constructed of painted and rendered reinforced concrete construction. Highly intact, the house features unusual reinforced concrete internal walls and door and window “cut outs”, and front boundary fence;

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *loc cit*, p.26.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *loc cit*, pp.89, 26.

²¹ Context Pty Ltd, et.al., ‘City of Newtown Urban Conservation Study’, vol.3, City of Newtown, 1991, p.183.

²² Authentic Heritage Services Pty Ltd, ‘Geelong Cement: Former Protestant Orphan Asylum & Common School, A.P.C.L. Head Office & Surrounding Land’, Heritage Report & Guidelines for Future Development, prepared for GHD Pty Ltd for Geelong Cement, March 2000.

²³ Authentic Heritage Services Pty Ltd, ‘Greater Geelong Outer Areas Heritage Study Stage 2’, prepared for the City of Greater Geelong, April 2000.

Relatively few reinforced or camerated concrete houses are known to have been built Australia-wide in the period c.1905-12; fewer survive. Concrete blocks were far more widespread in this period. *Gollers Court* was built in the early phase of this technology in Australia, and would appear to be one of relatively few examples known to survive.

Reinforced Concrete: Shire of Melton

Stage One of the Melton Heritage Study identified three sites of ruinous reinforced concrete dwellings, none of which are comparable with *Gollers Court* in terms of intactness, or (likely) original construction quality and size. They are:- Site No.344, a substantial ruin of (barely) reinforced concrete, on a perhaps very early bluestone foundation in a complex of stone walls and typical early twentieth century plantings, situated south of the Kororoit Creek east of Clarke's Road; Site No.424, the substantial remains (walls) of a reinforced concrete house apparently built for Cockbill's quarry workers on the south side of the railway line c.500 metres east of Paynes Road Rockbank; and the substantial remains (walls etc) of an identical pair of houses also apparently built for Cockbill's quarry workers, retaining period features such as shaped timber door lintels, and situated on the east side of Paynes Road south of the railway line, Rockbank. This latter site, the best of the three, has apparently been demolished within the past year.

Five probably early reinforced concrete houses within the Shire of Melton appear to be noteworthy, and there may have been an innovative builder working in the district in this period. No houses of comparable vintage or integrity to *Gollers Court* were identified in the adjoining City of Hume Heritage Study.²⁴

Condition:

Ruinous due to fire 2007

Integrity:

Damaged by fire

Recommendations:

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

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

²⁴ In c.1922-26 six concrete houses, of which at least four may still remain, were built by HV McKay for share farmers on the former Clarke Rupertswood Estate (Moloney, D, Johnson, V, 'City of Hume Heritage Study: Former Shire of Bulla District [1998], Vol 4, Part 5, Site BA/09, pp.1-5). [NB: check City of Brimbank Heritage Study for any similar examples identified in the Deer Park / St Albans areas].

