

Heritage Overlay No.: 070
Citation No.: 188
Place: Darlingsford Barn

Other Names of Place: N/A
Location: 13-15 Darlingsford Boulevard, Melton
Critical Dates: Construction: c.early 1870s
Existing Heritage Listings: None
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

Darlingsford Barn, at 13-15 Darlingsford Boulevard, Melton, is significant as the only physical legacy of a small farm that was situated on this site from at least 1862 until the 1970s, and which was one of the most prominent and successful in the Melton area. This Victorian vernacular] styled building has been substantially altered and converted into a function centre. Darlingsford Barn at 13-15 Darlingsford Road is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A.4). It is a rare relic of a farm building from the original (c.1850s-80s) farming period in the Shire. It is almost certainly associated with Cr Ralph Parkinson JP, twice President of the Shire of Melton, a progressive farmer who introduced steam traction engines and threshing machines into the district, and who was a pioneer of use of manures of various descriptions on pasture as well as crops, local carter, and renowned for his local charity. The farm itself was one of the most successful in Melton, having subsequently been associated with the racehorse interests of Cr Richard Manning, proprietor of the Raglan Hotel, and also President of the Shire

of Melton; and CE Barrie, prominent in the important Melton chaff industry, and owner of chaff mills in Melton, Parwan, Footscray and Diggers Rest.

Darlingsford Barn at 13-15 Darlingsford Road is aesthetically and socially significant at a LOCAL level (AHC E.1, G.1). It is a distinctive and quite imposing farm building, situated near the centre of Melton, near the picturesque Toolern Creek, and constructed of the bluestone that is geographically and historically so closely associated with the locality. The efforts of the community to preserve it as an historical landmark were eventually realised in its restoration for a community function centre (although much damage had been done to the building before this could be achieved).

Darlingsford Barn at 13-15 Darlingsford Road has architectural interest. The broad gable roof form and coursed, squared rubble bluestone wall construction are important Victorian vernacular design elements that may reflect the original form and construction of this considerably altered building.

Overall, the former Darlingsford Barn is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

Darlingsford Barn, at 13-15 Darlingsford Boulevard, Melton, has a large setback from the road and an open setting. The front has a recent pedestrian path flanked by lavender bushes and open grassed areas. Two two gums trees nearby contribute a rural setting to the building, which is now set in a new subdivision near Toolern Creek.

The single storey, coursed rubble bluestone, Victorian vernacular styled building is characterised by an early broad gable roof form. The roof is clad in introduced corrugated Colorbond. There are two large openings at one end with vertically boarded timber doors. These doors and the larger doors on the other gable end have been introduced. There are also timber ventilation openings that may have been introduced.

A photograph of 1994 shows the barn unroofed, and with up to a metre of bluestone walling removed from the extreme left hand side of an otherwise mostly intact façade. Brick window architraves are no longer visible from the exterior of the restored building (although they could remain under the new timber louvres), and the central front entrance has been increased in height, requiring the removal of the the large timber lintel. A similar large timber lintel over a high door on the rear façade may be original.

The unusually broad front elevation may be the result of side additions associated with developments on the property, such as Manning's racehorse program.

History:

The building is situated on Crown Allotment A, Section 11, Parish of Kororoit, situated on the east bank of the Toolern Creek near Melton. This property of 176 acres was purchased by Thomas B Darling, on 29th March 1853.¹

Thomas Bell Darlling, a chemist of Elizabeth Street, Melbourne, purchased other property in the suburbs and land in the Seymour district in the following years. A search of directories for the period 1853-1860 indicates that Darling maintained his Melbourne business interests, so while it is possible that he lived on the Melton property at some stage, it is more likely that

¹ Parish Plan, Parish of Kororoit
Consultants: David Moloney, David Rowe, Pamela Jellie (2006)

he either leased it out the property for farming, or engaged a manager on his behalf. The fact that his name has continued to be associated with the property (based on the ford over the nearby creek, now with a modern low-level concrete bridge) is unusual and significant.

At this stage no record has been found for the property before the arrival of Lancashire man Ralph Parkinson from Kyneton soon after 1862. Parkinson arrived in Melton with two threshing machines and their drivers, William Watts and John Chapman.² He bought *Darlingsford*, married the daughter of his neighbour, John Purchase, and entered into the life of the community, becoming a Shire Councillor (President in 1876-77, and 1886-87).³

He was a stalwart of the Church of England, being one of the trustees of the land reserved for the church in 1864, and a Sunday School teacher.⁴ When the bluestone church was completed Parkinson risked breaking his neck to climb up and see what sort of cross had been put on the building. He came down and said that he did ‘not think that he could cut stone with a knife’, to which the builder replied that he did not think they could ‘have nailed the Saviour to a stone cross’.⁵

His charitable deeds were renowned:- ‘...he would send a basket of eatables to anyone requiring them’, and each year every widow in the township received a bag of flour with two wagonloads of firewood.⁶

In 1876, the *Australasian’s* Travelling Reporter visited Parkinson’s property. His report provides insight into some of the major changes that were occurring amongst Melton farmers at that time, especially the transition from cropping to dairying, as well as some of Parkinson more innovative and experimental practices, and is worth reporting in full:

‘Mr Ralph Parkinson is a resident of 14 years standing. Mr Parkinson is the owner of 500 acres of land, altogether the greater portion being situated about half a mile to the north [sic] of the township with a frontage to the Djerriwarrh [sic] Creek, a never ending stream of water.

None of the land is under crop this season, but last year about 75 acres were sown, chiefly with wheat, which gave a return of 16 bushels per acre.

Mr Parkinson is a great believer in manure and has made it his practice for years to give a top dressing of bone dust every time the land is cropped at the rate of 4 cwt. to the acre; the bones being ground upon his farm. As he does not confine himself to the manuring of grain crops, he makes it a rule to heavily dress the pasture land that has been laid down with English grasses. Farm manure is used for this purpose, the greater portion of which is carted from Bacchus Marsh nine miles distant, and though the expense is considerable, Mr Parkinson is well satisfied with results and considers himself amply repaid for the outlay. The land dressed with manure gives a good supply of grass at all seasons of the year and the owner is enabled to keep three or four times the number of stock upon it than he would otherwise.

² Alexander Cameron, ‘Melton Memoirs’, M&DHS typescript.

³ Starr, J, *Melton: Plains of Promise* (Shire of Melton, nd, c.1985), p.265; Alexander Cameron, ‘Old Time Melton’, in *Melton Express*, 22nd January 1921.

⁴ *ibid*, p.168, Cameron, *op cit*, p.10

⁵ Cameron, *op cit*, p.11

⁶ Cameron, *op cit*, pp.10-11

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The land is divided up into seven conveniently sized paddocks, about 60 acres being laid down with English grasses and 70 acres have this year been sown with Lucerne at the rate of 7lb to the acre. The paddocks laid down in grass are now giving a good supply of feed, but the Lucerne has not made as much progress as yet, owing to the dryness of the season.

Dairying is now the principal pursuit and there is a mixed herd of about 50 head of cattle kept upon the farm. It is the intention of Mr Parkinson to gradually work into pure shorthorns by the use of well-bred bulls; the one now with the herd is a very fair animal by the Duke of Lancaster.

There are six horses, including two fine draught horses and a splendid five year old gelding by Mr Fell's Scottish Chief. Both of the mares have yearling fillies, one by Mr Rowan's Victor, and the other by Mr Morley's Muir Lad and each gives good promise of turning out a valuable animal.

On this farm it is the practice to take care of all the chaff and straw at threshing time, which is carefully preserved for the use of stock in the winter and by adopting this plan they are greatly helped in bad seasons. This is the practice that farmers would do well to follow, as a few handful of chaff or straw would keep the stock from starving when there is no grass.

There is a well-appointed homestead upon this farm, the proprietor's residence being a commodious stone cottage and the various necessary outbuildings are roomy and conveniently arranged. There is an ample supply of water in the driest seasons from a large underground tank, situated a short distance of the house and stables.

Attached to the residence is an orchard containing about two acres, which is well stocked with a good variety of miscellaneous fruit trees, most of them promising well this season for a good crop. A substantial stone wall encloses the orchard, and the space between the trees has been sown with English grasses, the stock being turned in to eat the herbage down occasionally.

In addition to carrying on the business of farmer, Mr Parkinson is the owner of two threshing machines and until the last few years he obtained a considerable amount of work for them in the neighbourhood and the surrounding districts. Since the falling off in the extent of land under cultivation however, he has as a matter of course had less work for his machines and intends in the future to devote his energies more to the management of his own farm than to looking after them.⁷

Other snippets of life on Parkinson's farm appear in extracts from the local newspaper. In 1870 David Rigg, a band cutter on Mr Parkinson's threshing machine, slipped into drum and died as a result of injuries sustained.⁸ In 1887, again in harvest time, it was reported that Cr Parkinson was suffering severe shock following the death of Henry Meirs.⁹ Returning home after an argument with Melton hotelier Cr Manning (in which he was objecting to the practice of labourers cashing their cheques at hotels), Parkinson had distractedly moved a dray carting hay on, causing Meirs to fall of the wagon and break his neck.

⁷ *The Australasian*, October 1876, p.471

⁸ *The Bacchus Marsh and Melton Express*, 8th January 1870.

⁹ *The Bacchus Marsh and Melton Express*, 1st January 1887

Consultants: David Moloney, David Rowe, Pamela Jellie (2006)

Parkinson was also involved in carting manure from Bacchus Marsh to Sydenham railway station, where it was loaded on railway trucks for the city. Having two horse teams he was able to maintain a steady work in this line while still working the farm.¹⁰

Parkinson, a widower, died in March 1887 a very wealthy man, holding parcels of shares in banking and insurance as well as property in the Melton district. His only daughter Alice received more than £10,000 cash, held in trust in addition to the property.¹¹

After some time under a manager, by 1892 *Darlingsford* was sold to Richard Manning, Bacchus Marsh and Melton hotelier.¹² As a lad Manning had worked on the station of Messrs Griffiths and Greene (probably *Woodlands*, in Bulla), after which he had purchased a team of bullocks with which he carted to the gold diggings, and then purchased the Raglan Hotel in Melton. He had many interests, including being a racing enthusiast, land speculator and investor.¹³ Manning also was a Councillor, and Melton Shire President in 1879-80.¹⁴

He leased the *Darlingsford* property to the Walsh family, connections of the Minns family. This arrangement was not successful and a resulting court case indicates that the property was not maintained as when Parkinson was in residence.

Manning's acquisition of horses from the *Melton Park* horse sales saw racehorses become a larger part of his life, and the Manning family returned to hands-on farmers. It was during this period that changes were made to the shedding on the property, including conversion of a chaff shed to a stable.¹⁵

Charles Ernest Barrie purchased *Darlingsford* from the Manning estate in 1910. Barrie was the owner of chaff mills in Melton South and Rockbank and in partnership, in Parwan, Footscray and Diggers Rest. He was also a successful breeder of draught horses; thus the former milling shed, thought to have been used by Parkinson to grind bone meal, was converted to a barn for breeding purposes.¹⁶

The Barrie sons who inherited the property subdivided it into two parcels, *Darlingsford* going to the younger son, Charles Edgar Barrie.

In 1974 the property was acquired by the CRB for the Melton By-Pass. Soon after CE Barrie died, and the family moved out of the property. As an untenanted property, the buildings attracted the attention of vandals and thieves. In 1991 the property had been ransacked and burnt by vandals. The house, comprising a bluestone rear which retained timber shingles under roofing iron, and an early twentieth century front addition, had by 1994 been substantially damaged by vandalism and neglect. Chris Johnston, in the Rural Heritage Study of that year reported that the:

‘large bluestone stable/barn building, buttressed on one side and with an internal loft, has been badly damaged by fire. The internal supports for the loft floor were large bush poles. The corrugated roof has collapsed as a result of the fire.’

¹⁰ Alexander Cameron's Memoirs

¹¹ *The Bacchus Marsh and Melton Express*, 6th March 1887; Cameron, op cit, p.11

¹² Shire Map Series, Map 29, 1892 (SLV 821.1A)

¹³ *Express*, 22/1/1921

¹⁴ Starr, op cit, p.265.

¹⁵ Personal conversation, Judith Bilszta with Mrs Keith Gillespie (nee Kilpatrick), 1984. (Manning's second wife was Mary Kilpatrick.)

¹⁶ Promotion brochure Wood's Real Estate based on Barrie family information.
Consultants: David Moloney, David Rowe, Pamela Jellie (2006)

There is now no sign of the house, a bluestone cottage said to date to 1874, or the two wells, that were identified in the 1994 study. The timber vehicle bridge across the creek has also been replaced with a low-level modern concrete structure.¹⁷

Local efforts to have the property registered under the Historic Buildings Act had been too late. In 1996 the property was subdivided and offered for sale as Melton's most exclusive residential address. The developers of the *Darlingsford Estate* under consulting architect Andrew Varga restored the barn / milling shed, which is now made available to the public by the Shire of Melton as a function centre.

While it is highly likely that the property was used for farming prior to Parkinson's arrival, it could be assumed that most if not all of the enduring farm outbuildings were erected during Parkinson's flourishing tenure. Although the threshing machines were not housed, shedding was needed for milking and the dairy, stabling horses, and accommodation for workmen. A building would also have been required for grounding bone on the property, which was a major part of farm operations, as reported by the *Australasian*. It is highly likely that the bluestone barn was originally used for some of these purposes.

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Melton Historical Themes: 'Farming'

Known Comparable Examples in Melton Shire:

The barn/stable has a varied history, but could be compared with custom designed stables such as those that survive at *Glen Elgin*, or even *Eynesbury*, although the scale and quality of construction, as well as the integrity and condition is of course much less than in *Eynesbury* in particular. It might also be compared with the huge bluestone barn on *Exford*, although again, it is much smaller, and more altered. The large barn / stable / cookhouse at Mt Aitken (Place No.136) is comparable, but in a derelict/ruinous condition. The *Rockbank* (Deanside) shearing shed (Place No.428), on the VHR, is another comparable large farm outbuilding.

The relics of 1850s and 60s era farms of any size in the municipality are very scant, comprising mostly ruins of small bluestone houses. *Darlingsford* was a medium sized successful farm, most comparable with the Campbells' *Toolern Park*, Samuel Kitson's farm *Brookfield*, the Moylans' *Mt Kororoit Farm*, *The Willows*, the Beatys' *Pinewood*, *Glencoe*, and *Rocklands*, and *Glen Elgin*, although most of these were early and larger enterprises. Apart from the brick stables at *Glen Elgin*, nothing comparable survives from these properties.

None of the surviving smaller early farms in the Truganina area - *Rocklands*, *Tibbermore* and the *Evansdale* - retains a large barn, although the Evans farm does retain a very small and bluestone building in poor condition that was used for a variety of farm purposes in its early days.

Condition:

Good

¹⁷ Johnston, C *Rural Heritage Study: Western Region of Melbourne* (Context Pty Ltd, Melbourne Western Region, 1994), pp.135-136
Consultants: David Moloney, David Rowe, Pamela Jellie (2006)

Integrity:

Altered - Low integrity.

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>