

Heritage Overlay No.: 081
Citation No.: 216
Place: Coronation Tree, Hannah Watts Park

Other Names of Place: N/A
Location: Hannah Watts Park, High Street Melton
Critical Dates: 1952
Existing Heritage Listings: None
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

The Coronation Tree in Hannah Watts Park, High Street Melton, is of heritage significance as the expression of the Melton community's celebration of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953, and of local affection for the new monarch. It is also a very fine specimen of a Mexican cypress tree.

The Coronation Tree in Hannah Watts Park, High Street Melton is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4, H1). It was planted by local dignitaries with all formality, and in the presence of the entire Melton State School No.430, to celebrate and mark the occasion of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 2nd June 1953. It is expressive of the colossal popular interest in the monarchy and ties with Empire at the time, as evident in the huge crowds that turned out to greet the young new monarch when she visited Australia the following summer.

Consultants: David Moloney, David Rowe, Pamela Jellie (2006) Sera Jane Peters (2007)

It is the only known public memorial to Queen Elizabeth II, and the monarchy, in the Shire. The tree is also prominently situated beside the main road, in the main public reserve.

The Coronation Tree in Hannah Watts Park, High Street Melton is of social and aesthetic significance at a LOCAL level (AHC E1). The tree was identified as being a place valued by the local community at a heritage study forum. It is a very fine specimen of a Mexican cypress (*cupressus lusitanica*).

Overall, the Coronation Tree in Hannah Watts Park, High Street Melton is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

The tree is a very fine specimen of a Mexican cypress (*cupressus lusitanica*), a species that is suitable to the low rainfall of the Melton Shire.

The tree is prominently situated beside the High Street entrance to the town (Melbourne side), in Hannah Watts Park.

History:

The Coronation Tree was planted in honour of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 2nd June 1953.

In 1952 Princess Elizabeth had begun a visit to Australia and New Zealand in the place of her father, King George VI, who had become ill. During the first stage of this journey (before she arrived in Australia) she received the news of her father's death and her own accession to the throne. Her Coronation, in Westminster Abbey, was broadcast around the world on radio and (at the Queen's request) television. (Television was credited with bringing home the splendour and the deep significance of the Coronation to many hundreds of thousands of people in a way never before possible.) While television was in its relative infancy and not available in Australia at the time, this did not dampen public enthusiasm when in the summer of 1953 the Queen set out to finish the Commonwealth tour she had begun before the death of her father. On this the first of her many visits to Australia the public interest was colossal, with immense cavalcades through the streets of Melbourne and other capital cities.

The fervour for Empire and monarchy permeated the nation. The small community of Melton joined in the celebrations by the ceremonial planting of the fir tree in Hannah Watts Park. The whole Melton State School No.430 was paraded over to the site, where in the presence of a good local crowd (perhaps 30-40 adults), the tree was planted with appropriate ceremony.¹

The plaque that was placed at the tree as part of this ceremony no longer survives.

The tree is valued by the local community, which identified it as a place of local historical significance in the Community Workshop undertaken as part of Stage One the Melton Heritage Study.²

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

¹ Mr Ray Radford, personal conversations, 21/5/2002, 5/11/2005. (Mr Radford attended the ceremony as a schoolboy).

² Held at the Willows Historical Park, 7/9/2001.

Melton Historical Themes: ‘Community’

Known Comparable Examples:

The only other known ceremonially planted trees in the Shire are:-

- A Red Cross memorial claret ash on the east side of Yuille Street opposite front door of the then new Municipal Office, planted by TL Barrie, wife of the current Shire President, in 1959.³ The specific purpose of the commemoration is not known. It survives.
- In 1935 the first trees in an avenue of elms on the Western Highway, at the 23 mile post (a place locally known as called Gateskill Hill), was ceremoniously planted by Governor Lord Huntingfield and his wife Lady Huntingfield as part of their visit to the Shire (Stage One Melton Heritage Study Site No.259). This was part of a CRB plantation. A remnant of this avenue, bypassed by the Melton Freeway, survives.⁴ It comprises exotic trees, mainly elms, small and in very poor condition, and overgrown with suckers.

Condition:

Excellent

Integrity:

Substantially Intact.

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</i>
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	<i>No</i>

Other recommendations:

- That an interpretive plaque be erected near the path to explain the significance of the tree.

³ Melton Express cutting 1959 (undated), MDHS collection.

⁴ Bob Macdonald, ‘History of Melton’ (unpublished typescript, 1969, held by MDHS), p.16; also George Minns, ‘Looking Back’ (unpublished typescript, MDHS)