

**Heritage Overlay No.:** 084  
**Citation No.:** 227  
**Place:** Melton Weir

---

**Other Names of Place:** Melton Reserve Causeway  
**Location:** Nixon Street Melton (over Toolern Creek)  
**Critical Dates:** Construction: 1890  
**Existing Heritage Listings:** None  
**Recommended Level of Significance:** LOCAL



**Statement of Significance:**

The McKenzie Street Weir and Ford over Toolern Creek, built 1890, and now used only as a road causeway, is historically significant at the LOCAL level (AHC D2, B2). It represented the realisation of a local idea to mitigate the particularly low rainfall of the Melton district, and was also the second and last attempt to provide a dependable supply of healthy drinking water in the town by means of a major public engineering work. The idea for the weir appears to have originated in an idea of Shire Secretary Stewart in 1886 to build weirs where watercourses required to be bridged. The Council responded positively to the idea of combining bridges with dams, ‘a dry district like this’.

While, like all other early public works attempted, the Weir does not appear to have been successful in achieving its objectives, and the town was essentially dependent on bore and tank water until the provision of reticulated water from the Djerriwarrh Dam in 1963.

The weir, now used only as a road, stands as a substantial testament to the problem of water in Melton, and a local attempted resolution of the problem.

Overall, the McKenzie Street Weir and Ford over Toolern Creek is of LOCAL heritage significance.

### **Description:**

The causeway across the Toolern Creek, McKenzie Street / Reserve Road, Melton was originally constructed as a combined bridge and weir. It was described at the time of its construction as consisting of a concrete wall 140 feet (42.5 metres) long, and 12 feet (3.5 metres) deep. This wall was 2 feet wide at the top, and 4 feet at the bottom, embedded in solid rock. It was filled with clay and pitched on the front and top with 9 inch pitchers. The roadway was 20 feet (6 metres) wide. It had a 'strong chain' running through posts on the downstream side of the roadway (which was nevertheless washed downstream in times of heavy flood), and a wire cable on the upstream side. It is not known whether it was built with the sluice valve and outlet pipe that some local people thought would be necessary to keep it clean and effective. When completed it was judged to have 'the appearance of a strong piece of work', that would 'speak for itself in time'.

The battered sides of the structure are still paved with roughly squared bluestone blocks. Its road pavement is also cobbled with bluestone, although this may have been renewed in recent years. Two reinforced concrete pipes have been inserted into the bottom of the dam to carry the stream, effectively converting the weir and ford into a simple causeway. This alteration is sizeable and visually intrusive, but not large enough to diminish the appearance or overall integrity of the substantial causeway structure.

### **History:**

Since the 1960s Melton has been amply supplied with water. In c.1963 reticulated water was provided from the Djerriwarrh Creek Reservoir. In the early 1960s the Melton Weir on the Werribee River became popular for speedboat and water ski sports. It is now hard to imagine the difficulties associated with procuring this basic commodity in Melton prior to these quite recent times.

In 1867 the West Bourke Agricultural Inspector described Melton as 'a pretty, though parched up township'.<sup>1</sup> Although this was a period of general drought in Victoria, even at this relatively early stage Melton was clearly recognised as a notably dry place.

Subsequent scientific records confirmed this dryness. The 'Melton Mallee' woodland near the Djerriwarrh Creek is the only place where mallee vegetation is found south of the Dividing Range.<sup>2</sup> The area from about Bacchus Marsh - Diggers Rest to the Bay and towards Geelong has the lowest average rainfall in the Port Phillip district, about 22 inches (56 cm). The area between Melton and Werribee has the lowest rainfall of all, less than 18 inches (46 cm).<sup>3</sup>

Places associated with the provision of domestic and stock water supply - above-ground domestic water tanks, bores and pumps, domestic water dams, stock water reserves, rural and of

---

<sup>1</sup> *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, 1867, Vol.3, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, pp.83-84.

<sup>2</sup> National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Landscape Classification Report. Also *Ballarat Courier*, 11/6/1983

<sup>3</sup> Peel, *op cit*, p.9

course town dams - are therefore of particular significance in Melton Shire. Although apparently of limited success, the Melton Weir was a local innovation heralded in its time as a solution to Melton's particular problem.

Significantly, one of the Robinson family stories that survived through the generations relates to water. Jeff Robinson's great grandmother Mrs Raleigh carried water in buckets from a stream 'at least a mile away' to their Harkness Road house in dry periods. And yet the Robinson family was relatively fortunate in living relatively close to the Djerriwarrh Creek. With the Werribee River it would have been one of the more reliable streams in the area.

Townpeople were also dependent on the streams, and had to walk distances for this basic commodity. Hjorth recollected the township in its very early days:

'The water supply was very deficient, a few had iron tanks, and some under-ground ones. After a lengthy spell of dry weather, the creek had to be depended on, and that supply often got exhausted near the village, but a mile to the south of it, there was generally a good supply to be got in the creek.'

Although there is conflicting information regarding the date of its construction, the 'Reservoir', an earthen tank created adjacent to the Toolern Creek at the eastern end of the town, would appear to have been commenced in 1879, and probably completed in 1882 (Site Report No.208, 'Melton Reservoir'). The intention that the reservoir would have provided water for townpeople to carry away for their domestic use in times of drought. The scheme was not an immediate or unequivocal success, 'sludge' from the creek being a problem. Although Council committed money to cleaning it, very soon was used only by collecting water for animal tanks and troughs.

The debate about a water reservoir in the town continued. The Government had been in contact with the Shire seeking recommendations for site/sites suitable for water storage. Strong support for a site over Yuille Street opposite the Anglican Church came to nothing. The Council then worked toward installing bores in various locations. Although representation was made through the local member S.T. Staughton, no action was taken at this time.

The dire problem remained, and on the 18<sup>th</sup> January 1884 Mr A Blackwood, blacksmith, is recorded as leading a delegation that:

'begged that the Council would do all in their power to get a supply of water into the township, and let it cost what it may, the people should have water, if it was possible to obtain it, as the Reservoir did not seem to be likely to meet the demand'.<sup>4</sup>

It was in this climate of urgent need that the idea that would later be realised in the Melton Weir seems to have been conceived. In discussing plans for new bridges at 'Minns' (the Minns Road crossing of Toolern Creek), and the 'Reserve' (the Holden Road crossing of the Kororoit Creek ) at a meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1886, Shire Secretary Stewart raised a new idea. He asked Council to consider:

'if, in a dry district like this, dams would not be preferable to bridges and save water for graziers and farmers, as at present the water that could be retained for their benefit was allowed to go to waste.'

His idea was to build dams, which could double as high fords or causeways, where roads crossed streams. This simple idea, of combining bridges and dams, was thought by Council to

---

<sup>4</sup> MDHS

be an idea worth following up, as it resolved that ‘plans for a dam as well as a bridge be prepared for Minns Bridge and the Engineer report on both there and the Reserve’.<sup>5</sup>

Two months later the Shire Engineer tabled his plans for both a ‘stone weir also pile bridge over Kororoit Creek at Reserve’. The comparison must not have been favourable, as the Council resolved to get on with building a pile bridge.<sup>6</sup> The idea was still had appeal however, as the question of a ‘Dam at Minns?’ was on the agenda of the meeting of February 1887, and again in April when it was revealed that shafts sunk had revealed gravel to a depth of 18 feet at the Minns crossing.<sup>7</sup> The poor foundational and water-holding quality of this site may have been significant, as by June in 1888 construction of the present Minns bridge was underway.<sup>8</sup>

In November 1888 the Council commissioned engineers Muntz and Bage to survey for a ‘bridge and weir near Melton’, and authorized its South Riding councillors to make necessary arrangements for plans for such.<sup>9</sup> Next month the Public Works Department had endorsed the idea, and allocated £125 towards construction of the ‘weir and ford’ over Toolern Creek near Melton. The Shire President had enlisted the support of local parliamentarian Sir WJ Clarke in a deputation to the Minister seeking a larger grant.<sup>10</sup>

The deputation was successful, and in December the Council resolved that, subject to the engineers’ costs being reduced to £600, made up of a Government contribution of £300, and £150 each from the Melton and Braybrook Councils (the Toolern Creek was the boundary between the Shires at the time), the plans be forwarded to Government for inspection.

The proposal was not without its controversy. In January 1889 a petition was presented to Council in February, at which meeting the objections of M Moylan, P Atley, P Coburn and others were heard. They protested firstly against the expense of the proposed weir, arguing that boring for water would be better; secondly that it would not hold water; and thirdly that it would become ‘a receptacle for all the filth of the township drainage’, remediative measures for which would mean it would cost much more than the current estimate. The Council subsequently resolved to proceed with the project if the engineers ‘would be prepared to certify’ that a successful job would be achieved with a £600 budget, and if the PWD was also prepared to approve the project specifications. It authorized purchase of the allotment necessary for the bridge.<sup>11</sup>

Next month Council considered 6 tenders for the ‘construction of a weir and ford over Toolern Creek at Melton. The tenders ranged from £693 to £853. Local builder, and Councillor, Augustus Shebler (the lowest tenderer for the project), advised Council that a sluice was required to prevent the weir from silting up, and that this would add to the cost. Council decided to commit additional funds itself, and seek proportional increases in funding from both the PWD and the Shire of Braybrook, and then readvertise the tender. Despite a Melton delegation, Braybrook would not contribute any additional funds, and the final project budget became £750.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Shire of Melton, *Council Minutes*, 30/7/1886

<sup>6</sup> Shire of Melton, *Council Minutes*, 9/1886

<sup>7</sup> Shire of Melton, *Council Minutes*, 13/2/1887; 15/4/1887

<sup>8</sup> Shire of Melton, *Council Minutes*, 8/6/1888

<sup>9</sup> Shire of Melton, *Council Minutes*, 25/9/1888

<sup>10</sup> Shire of Melton, *Council Minutes*, 19/10/1888

<sup>11</sup> Shire of Melton, *Council Minutes*, 11/1/1889, 8/2/1889, 8/3/1889.

<sup>12</sup> Shire of Melton, *Council Minutes*, April to October 1889

Waiting on Braybrook had delayed the project, and tenders for an amended plan were not considered until May 1890. These tenders came in much lower, and that of £578.5.0 from Messrs Reed & Randall of Kensington was accepted. A motion from rural councillors Beattie and McCorkell to delay pending resolution of a question regarding a necessary land title was lost.

A Mr John U'reu was appointed Clerk of Works, and the job appears to have begun in late June 1890. In July Mr A Shebler again wrote suggesting that 'an outlet pipe and sluice valve be laid in new weir, also wire cabling instead of fencing.' Council left the question in the hands of the Shire Engineer and the Southern Riding Councillors.<sup>13</sup>

The weir was described as consisting of a concrete wall 140 feet (42.5 metres) long, and 12 feet (3.5 metres) deep. This wall was 2 feet wide at the top, and 4 feet at the bottom, embedded in solid rock. It was filled with clay and pitched on the front and top with 9 inch pitchers. The roadway was 20 feet (6 metres) wide. It had a 'strong chain' running through posts on the downstream side of the roadway (which was nevertheless washed downstream in times of heavy flood), and a wire cable on the upstream side. When completed by the end of August 1890 it was judged to have 'the appearance of a strong piece of work', that would 'speak for itself in time'.<sup>14</sup>

The dammed up water in the weir was apparently proposed to be channelled into the Reservoir (now the Hannah Watts Park lake) about 400 metres upstream.

The weir filled slowly from September. In November arrangements were made with the Ballarat Fish Acclimatisation Society to stock it with fish. The Society donated 60 perch, 5 carp, and 2 trout, all of which were delivered safely. The Council thanked the Society and erected notices cautioning people not to fish the weir for 12 months.<sup>15</sup>

The hopes raised by the solid new structure in the town are evident in the inclusion in the 1891 Municipal Directory of a piece advising that: 'A weir has been constructed at Melton across the Toolern Creek, which will supply sufficient water for all local wants during dry seasons. It will be stocked with fish at an early date.'<sup>16</sup> But before the year was out those who had always held doubts about the structure were arguing that their fears had been well founded. A letter to the local newspaper claimed that sceptics and opponents of the weir had been thought to be 'foolish and did not know much about what they were talking about. But let a man with commonsense just take a stroll to the weir now and he will wonder where all the money has been spent, for because of looking proudly over a great sea of water and the pleasures of boating and angling, his eyes will rest on a weir full of silt and mud, a veritable slough of despond with the prospect of summer coming and the city [sic] no better provided for than before.'<sup>17</sup>

The problem did indeed remain. In 1892 the ratepayers held yet another meeting, approaching the Council to make use of the government diamond drill that Harvey Patterson of Melton Park was using to look for gold. The Council passed a rate of three pence in the pound to finance this and four bores were put down:- in McCorkell's

---

<sup>13</sup> Shire of Melton, *Council Minutes*, November 1889 – July 1890.

<sup>14</sup> Macdonald, *History of Melton*, *op cit*, p.13; Shire of Melton, *Council Minutes*, 22/8/1890

<sup>15</sup> Shire of Melton, *Council Minutes*, November 1890 to January 1891.

<sup>16</sup> Victorian Municipal Directory, 1891

<sup>17</sup> *The Melton Express*, 29/8/1891

Lane in the north riding; on the Toolern Road; near the Wesleyan Church in Melton; and also near the Toolern Creek. The latter was the most promising, and the ratepayers collected funds and obtained a small grant from the Braybrook Council to put a pump and a windmill on this. It provided 'good mineral water' for stock,<sup>18</sup> and in 1899 a 'Water Supply Reserve' was gazetted on the site, on the west bank of Toolern Creek on the north side of High Street.<sup>19</sup>

In the end the town had had to resort to the same windmill and dam ('tank') solution that sustained the rural parts of the Shire. The small township was able to support two 'tank makers' – Messrs Cecil and Shebler.<sup>20</sup>

The weir, as with the reservoir before it, does not appear to have provided a satisfactory water storage for the town. In April 1898 it was necessary for yet another 'water committee' to be formed in the town.<sup>21</sup> More money was raised to sink another bore in the Melton to Toolern Road.<sup>22</sup> In 1909 when Premier Murray visited the Shire he was asked if the 'boring plant' could be kept in the district.<sup>23</sup>

A 1954 promotional screed on the town stated: 'We have no water supply, residents being dependent on tanks and wells. There is however, artesian and bore water available in many parts of the Shire.'<sup>24</sup> The town was still dependent on bore and tank water when reticulated water arrived in the 1960s.

The substantial weir is still standing, now used only as a road. While its success in providing water for the town appear to have been very limited, it nevertheless stands as a substantial testament to the problem of water in Melton, and a local attempted resolution of the problem.

---

<sup>18</sup> Cameron, *op cit*, pp.24-25

<sup>19</sup> 'Township of Melton, Parish of Djerriwarrah'

<sup>20</sup> Collins, *op cit*.

<sup>21</sup> *The Melton Express*, 6/4/1898

<sup>22</sup> *The Melton Express*, 10/12/1898

<sup>23</sup> *The Melton Express*, 27/3/1909

<sup>24</sup> MDHS

**Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:**

*Melton Historical Themes: ‘Water’, ‘Transport’*

*Known Comparable Examples:*

The Reservoir in Hannah Watts Park is the only other surviving evidence of the attempts to provide a town water supply prior to reticulated water from Djerriwarrh Dam in the mid 1960s. There is no obvious evidence of the bores that were sunk in High Street, and Palmerston Street Melton, or the windmill and tank that were erected on the High Street (Golf Course) site.

**Condition:**

Fair

**Integrity:**

Altered Sympathetically

**Recommendations:**

Recommended for inclusion in the Shire of Melton Planning Scheme

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

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