

Heritage Overlay	HO091
Citation No.:	241
Place:	CJ Melrose Memorial Cairn

Other Names of Place:	Jimmy Melrose Memorial Cairn
Location:	398-446 Clarkes Rd, Brookfield (East bank of Arnold Creek, opposite CJ Melrose Memorial Reserve).
Critical Dates:	1936, 1976
Existing Heritage Listings:	None
Recommended Level of Significance:	LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

The reconstructed 'Jimmy Melrose Memorial Cairn', at 398-446 Clarkes Road Brookfield (opposite the Melrose Memorial Reserve) is significant as a simple vernacular memorial to the famous young Australian aviator who was killed in an air-crash on this site in July 1936. Originally built by the scout group soon after the fatal crash, in 1976 the deteriorated fieldstone cairn was reconstructed by the Melton and District Historical Society to mark the fortieth anniversary of Melrose's death. It is built of the same materials, of the same proportions, and in the same place as the original.

The reconstructed 'Jimmy Melrose Memorial Cairn' is historically significant at the LOCAL level (AHC A4, H1). It is a monument to Charles James Melrose, a famous Australian pioneer aviator, who attracted international attention in the great London to Melbourne Centenary Air Race of 1934 as the youngest pilot, the only solo pilot, and the only Australian pilot to finish the race. In an age in which aviation feats generated huge public interest, Melrose was universally admired for his modesty and pleasant bearing as well as for his achievements. After his death he was held up as a model for youth, and the construction of the original cairn by a Scout group is a testament to the admiration of youth for an Australian aviation hero.

The reconstructed 'Jimmy Melrose Memorial Cairn' is socially significant at the LOCAL level (AHC G1). It demonstrates the continuing respect of the Melton community for Melrose, first demonstrated by the rudimentary cairn improvised by locals at the time of the crash.

Overall, the reconstructed 'Jimmy Melrose Memorial Cairn' is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

The memorial cairn is situated on amongst scrub and trees the east bank of the Arnold Creek. It marks the place at which the body of Melrose was found. It is presently difficult to locate and access. It consists of a mortared pile of volcanic fieldstone set on a concrete base and rising to approximately 1 metre high, on which is situated a metal plaque which reads:

'Memorial Cairn
Restored 1976 by Melton Historical Society to
Commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the Death
of the Noted Aviator
CHARLES JAMES (Jimmy) MELROSE
22 years of Glenelg S.A. who with his
passenger Alexander Campbell crashed
here on a flight to Adelaide on July 5th 1936.'

There is an interpretation plaque prominently situated in the 'CJ (Jimmy) Melrose Memorial Reserve' - a publicly accessible active recreation area on the opposite side of the creek - which gives a brief illustrated history of the aviator.

History:

Charles James (Jimmy) Melrose, born 1913, was scion of a wealthy South Australian pastoralist family; one uncle was pastoralist Sir John Melrose, another English aviator Pemberton Billing.¹ Upon leaving school he took up his childhood passion for flying. In 1934, age 18, he flew solo around Australia in a DH Puss Moth, taking almost two days off the previous record of seven days for the journey.

At aged 21 he flew to England in a record 8 days, 9 hours. In England the popular young record breaker was acclaimed not only for his skill as a pilot, but for his fine bearing and modesty.

On 20th October 1934 his tiny Puss Moth was one of 20 aircraft lined up at Mildenhall airport for the longest air race the world had ever known, the London to Melbourne Centenary Air Race. He was the youngest entrant amongst the cream of international flyers. The speedier and

¹ Jones, H, 'Melrose, Charles James', in Nairn, B, Serle, G, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol.10, pp.482-3

bigger aircraft shot ahead, and CW Scott and Campbell Black were the winners of the race in a slick Comet (forerunner of the Mosquito fighter-bomber). Melrose and the other smaller aircraft were left well behind, to tackle, by degrees, ice, oceans, tropical storms, and deserts. One of the close shaves that turned the international focus on Melrose was his arrival at Darwin, in which his engines cut out and, with empty petrol tanks, he glided into a head wind to land safely. Melrose was the only solo pilot, and the only Australian, to finish the race.² He was awarded a second prize of £500 in the handicap race, and silver medal from the King.

The shy, boyish hero was whisked the 12 miles by car from Laverton to join the midday motorcade through Melbourne in honor of the successful pilots. The crowds' most fervent admiration was reserved for Melrose: six policeman mounted the running boards of his car to keep at bay the men who tried to shake his hand and the women who fought to kiss him. While Melrose - handsome, broad-shouldered blue-eyed and flaxen haired - was held in special affection by women, his modesty was the admiration of the whole community. For many his reputation for strength of character was enhanced when at the sumptuous reception the only drink he sought was a glass of water. He had always kept early hours and exercised seriously, and he didn't drink or smoke, ate 'Oslo' lunches and was devoted to his widowed mother.

Melrose flew back to England where he acquired the four-passenger Heston Phoenix, a high winged monoplane that was the ultimate in British aircraft design. He christened it 'My Hildergarde' in honour of his mother. On his return to Australia he threw away any chance of creating a new England-Australia record by detouring to search for lost air hero Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith (who had disappeared after taking off from Allahabad India in his attempt to break the 1934 Centenary Air Race record of Scott and Black).

In Australia Melrose decided to charter his Heston Phoenix. On 5th July 1936 he took off from Essendon airport in foul weather with a passenger, a mining engineer named Alexander Campbell, bound for Oodnadatta via Adelaide. The aircraft disappeared from view into the low cloud, until almost an hour later residents of Melton South heard and saw the aircraft in trouble and breaking up. Its starboard wing came completely away. Pieces of wreckage were found over a wide area; the body of Melrose was found on the east bank of the Arnold Creek, and that of Campbell on the west bank.³ Melrose was 22 years old.

The tragic news flashed around the world. Among the international tributes, the *London Daily Telegraph* wrote that:

'In the short history of aviation there has been no more attractive figure than this adventurous and modest boy ... Never by word or action did he suggest that what he accomplished deserved the wonder that it excited. He remained the charming young man who refused to be lionised'.⁴

The *Telegraph* observed that 'Australian sorrow ... will be shared by the Empire, which he had brought nearer by his triumphs'. Aviation and wireless - the two great wonders of the early twentieth century - were routinely described in terms of bringing the world, and particularly the British Empire, closer. Of the two there was no question that the daring pioneers of aviation were the heroes of the day. Melrose has taken his place amongst the luminaries of Australia's early aviators, such as Bert Hinkler, Kingsford-Smith, Charles Ulm, Ross and Keith Smith, and PG Taylor.

² John Burke, 'The Last Flight of Jimmy Melrose', *Parade*, July 1972, pp.2-4

³ Gunton, E, *The Jimmy Melrose Story: Australia's Youngest Air Ace* (The Author, June 1990), p.120

⁴ *ibid*, p.122

Melbourne stopped for his funeral. Vast crowds thronged outside St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne, where the organist played the hymn 'Death of a Hero', and women and children lined the route of the procession to the Springvale Crematorium. Prime Minister Lyons expressed the nation's sympathy to his mother, and his regret that 'another of Australia's great airmen has died ... Australia loses a chivalrous young knight of the air, whom it can ill afford to lose.' In Adelaide both houses of Parliament adjourned as a token of respect. Much poetry was written, typically about an airman called to Valhalla's shores. A theme of newspapers was that his virtues of gallantry, modesty, and adventure 'would not be lost if the blood of Australian youth is stirred by his example'.⁵

Melrose was the image of a 'Boy's Own' hero,⁶ and the memorial cairn at Melton South testifies that Australian youth was indeed stirred by the example of the universally respected young man. The back page of Melbourne's *Sun* newspaper of 6th July 1936 carries a photograph of two young Melton South women in front of a 'little heap of stones' with which local's had marked the spot where his body was found.⁷ Later that same year an Essendon Scout Group renamed itself the 'Melrose Essendon Rangers'. In 1936 they took the train to Melton South and set up camp at the crash site, where they built a cairn, about one metre high of local field-stone mortared together, at the place where Melrose's body was found.

The cairn deteriorated, until in the early 70s it was about a quarter of its original height. In 1976, the fortieth anniversary of his death, the Melton and District Historical Society decided to rebuild it. EG (Bon) Barrie and Ray Radford recreated the historic marker.⁸ Six remaining members of the Melrose Scout Troop who had built the cairn assembled for the official opening of the reconstructed memorial.⁹

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Melton Historical Themes: 'Aviation – Communication'; 'Community'

Known comparable examples:

In Stirling in the Adelaide Hills a public subscription erected a drinking fountain in Melrose's honour, which is still standing. His name is also commemorated by James Melrose Road, which borders the Adelaide airport, and a look-out tower at the Glenelg Surf Life-Saving Club.¹⁰

Condition:

Good

Integrity:

Substantially Intact

Recommendations:

⁵ *ibid*, pp. 121-123

⁶ Burke, *op cit*, p.2

⁷ In National Trust File No.5994.

⁸ Ray Radford, pers. conv. 21st May 2002.

⁹ Photograph, in Starr, J, *Melton: Plains of Promise* (Shire of Melton, nd, c.1985), p.254,

¹⁰ Jones, *op cit*, p.482; Gunton, *op cit*, p.124

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

Other Recommendations:

- Surrounding trees and public access and interpretation should be addressed.