

**Heritage Overlay No.:** 105  
**Citation No.:** 293  
**Place:** Mt Cottrell Road Stock Yards & Ruins

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**Other Names of Place:** Mt Cottrell Sheep Wash  
**Location:** 1476-1570 Mount Cottrell Road, Mount Cottrell  
**Critical Dates:** c.late 1850s (original construction); c.1920 constr(possible abandonment of the house); mid twentieth century (probable action/reconstruction of some walls).  
**Existing Heritage Listings:** None  
**Recommended Level of Significance:** LOCAL



**Statement of Significance:**

The ruin, dry stone walls and sheep yards at 1476-1570 Mt Cottrell Road are an extensive, substantially intact, and unusual complex of dry stone walls, and stone farmhouse ruins and plantings that date to the beginnings of freehold farming settlement in the Melton district in the 1850s. The dry stone walls are of varying integrity and condition, but overall substantially intact. The peppercorn and sugar gum trees contribute to the historical character of the site.

The context of the site, in particular the dry stone walls along Mt Cottrell Road and Greigs Road, enhance its significance.

The ruins, dry stone walls and sheep yards at 1476-1570 Mt Cottrell Road are historically significant at a LOCAL level. (AHC A4, B2, D2) The partly dry-stone-wall lined dam is a characteristic and distinctive feature of the Melton area, where the especially dry climate, a high bedrock, and ample fieldstone induced this practice. The site is also of historical significance for its association with the George Scarborough, a very early and noted settler in Port Phillip, and for its potential to demonstrate changes in small-farming in an area dominated by large pastoralists. It is also of local historical significance as the site of the first pound in the Melton district, 1854-57; the pound and pound-keeper were highly important in nineteenth century rural communities. It demonstrates the early provision of domestic water supply, a water storage practice no longer in use, and the critical importance of water management in the dry Melton Plains district.

The ruins, dry stone walls and sheep yard are of scientific significance. (AHC C.2) The unusual configuration and relative intactness of the dry stone walls make the site of scientific significance for its considerable potential to demonstrate and provide further information about the nature of early small-farming practices, together with changes that have occurred in farming in the Melton district from the mid nineteenth century to late twentieth century. The ruins of the rubble bluestone building also has archaeological and interpretation potential for its ability to provide information regarding early settlement and living conditions of Melton district farmers. Similarly, survey of the bluestone underground tank also has the potential to provide further information about early farming practices and water storage in Melton Shire.

Overall, the ruins, dry stone walls and sheep yards at 1476-1570 Mt Cottrell Road are of LOCAL significance.

### **Description:**

The Mt Cottrell Road stock-yards, dam (alleged sheep-wash/dip), house ruin, dry stone walls and filled underground water storage tank, is a c.200 m long complex of largely intact and very substantial stone walls, which includes inner and outer yards, and a long (c.90 metres) stone fence joining the main yard area to a narrow dam (c.55 metres long), which is partly lined in fieldstones in the distinctive local manner, and is contained within dry-stone walls on its eastern and western sides.

The site also includes the ruins of well-constructed and substantial rubble bluestone building, most likely the original house. The maximum height of the walls is now c.1 metre, and the building was formerly about 11 metres by 8 metres, with evidence of an extension or an original addition (perhaps a pantry or store, or for animals). There is no obvious above-ground evidence of a chimney.

There is also a now-scarce and well-constructed uncapped bluestone underground tank of approximately two metres in diameter, now mostly filled. This is situated under peppercorn trees and in an area of other rubble with archaeological potential. Other elements of the site include a smaller dam and a shaped timber gatepost (very weathered, with a distinctive top) and a number of internal and boundary dry stonewalls, identified in detail below:

- An internal wall through the middle of the 2 properties, comprises two parts: a double post & wire dry stone wall in poor condition, 751-1000 mm high, 40 metres long, and

with a wide base of 1400 mm; this is continued by another double stone and post & wire wall in poor condition, 950 metres long, of height less than 300 mm, and base 800 mm.

- Its eastern boundary (Mount Cottrell Road) is a more substantial double post & wire dry stone wall, in good condition. It is 350 metres long, with a wide 1500mm base, and height of 1001-1300 mm. Parts retain coping stones, angled in places, and is smooth faced, with plugging, through-stones and trench. It is generally of the typical more rounded fieldstone of the area, but also contains section of flatter stone, some split/quarried (perhaps with stone from the former house).
- There is an internal stock holding yard, of double post & wire dry stone wall, in good (but variable) condition, of length c130 metres, base width 1200 mm, and height 1001-1300 mm. It contains some parts with coping stone, plugging, smooth facing, trenching and lichen. It is partly constructed of quarried/split stone, possibly recycled from the original house.
- Western boundary of property of 1476-1518 Mt Cottrell Rd is a double post and wire dry stone wall, 751-1000 mm in height and in good condition.

An internal arrangement of paddocks of double post and wire dry stone walls in varying condition, and states of preservation.

Some of the dry stone walls show evidence of repairs throughout their life. In 2006 some were also subject of repairs as a result of the Pride of Place workshop on maintaining dry stone walls in Melton.

The site is situated within a reasonably intact farming landscape, a feature of which is remnant dry stone walls along both sides of Mt Cottrell Road to the south and north of the property, and Greigs Road, in various states of intactness. As well as the peppercorn trees, the site also includes some mature sugar gum trees planted along its northern and eastern boundaries, probably in the early twentieth century.

### **History:**

The house ruins and stock yards are situated on Crown Allotment No.2, Section 11 Parish of Pywheitjorrk. On 7th October 1854 this 111 acre allotment was purchased at the Crown land sales by a George Scarborough 'of Braybrook' for £555.0.0. A few weeks earlier, on 19th September, Scarborough had purchased the 111 acre allotment abutting its southern boundary for £499.10.0 (CA No. 3).<sup>1</sup>

George Scarborough was one of Melbourne's earliest pioneer settlers, claiming to have arrived in the fledgling township of Melbourne in November 1835.<sup>2</sup> Early records show that he purchased land (CA 5 Sec.12, Town of Melbourne) at the first government auction on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1837. He bought this allotment for £18 and sold it on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1839 for £1050, just prior to

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<sup>1</sup> Registrar General's Office, General Law Memorial of land purchases (in AP 108758K). These two allotments have been a 'pair' - held by the same owners - until very recent times.

<sup>2</sup> Date given with his signature on the Loyal Address presented by the 'Victorian Pioneers' to the Duke of Edinburgh in 1867. (All of Scarborough's pre-Melton biographical details have been researched and provided by Mr Ken Smith of the Port Phillip Pioneers.)

the early 1840s depression.<sup>3</sup> He was successful also in having obtained the position of the Yarra Yarra (Melbourne) pound-keeper by June 1840.<sup>4</sup> This was an important, and lucrative, position in a pastoral and farming settlement, and Scarborough is recorded as a respected and active citizen in various other realms of society over the following years:- as a subscriber for the relief of the widow and family of the late William Wood in 1839;<sup>5</sup> as a subscriber to the building funds of both the Episcopalian Church and Wesleyan Chapel in 1840,<sup>6</sup> as one of the ‘burgesses’ supporting both Alderman William Kerr and candidate Patrick Reid as representatives for the Bourke Ward in 1843,<sup>7</sup> and as one of the Victorian Pioneer signatories to the Loyal Address presented to the Duke of Edinburgh in 1867. Not all of his causes were faultlessly respectable potential patrons, as in 1841 he appeared as a witness for the defence of Thomas Chandler, who was convicted of aggravated robbery and sentenced to be transported for 15 years.<sup>8</sup>

In 1842 Scarborough’s address was given as Lonsdale Street Melbourne.<sup>9</sup> Directories record that he was the poundkeeper for the ‘Melbourne pound’ until at least 1847.<sup>10</sup> In 1851 he is recorded as ‘poundkeeper, Moonee Ponds’.<sup>11</sup> During this period he had made other small purchases of land, at Dousta Galla (2 acres) and Richmond (1 acre), as well as a half share in 640 acres at Merriang (north of Melbourne).<sup>12</sup> An 1853 land transaction shows that he had a wife named Mary Ann.<sup>13</sup>

Government Gazettes show that in 1854 George Scarborough ‘of Mount Cottrell’ was appointed the Melton pound-keeper.<sup>14</sup> He resigned in 1857, and the pound was moved to nearer to Melton following agitation from local farmers. In April Charles M Williams was appointed pound-keeper, and the pound was moved near to *The Willows* homestead.<sup>15</sup>

Although they had no water frontage, Scarborough’s Mount Cottrell allotments were not cheap, purchased as they were at the height of gold-rush inflation, and in competition with big pastoralists. Immediately to his west was Simon Staughton’s pre-emptive right, and Simon Staughton had purchased the property on his southern boundary, and all the land to his east (across Mt Cottrell Road). The allotment to his north had been purchased by WF Tulloh as part of his *Strathtulloh* estate. WJT Clarke and his son Sir WJ Clarke soon acquired all the land on the opposite side of Mt Cottrell Road, and much land to the south of Scarborough, as part of the massive *Rockbank* estate.

Scarborough may also have been made offers for his property, but he was one of very few farmers in the whole Parish of Pywheitjorrk to remain on the land throughout the nineteenth

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<sup>3</sup> Registrar-General’s Office, Memorial ‘Sydney 319’.

<sup>4</sup> *Port Phillip Gazette*, 20/6/1840

<sup>5</sup> *Port Phillip Patriot*, 28/11/1839

<sup>6</sup> *Port Phillip Gazette*, 22/7/1840, 16/9/1840

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, 22/1/1843, 1/2/1843

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, 8/12/1841

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, 8/10/1842

<sup>10</sup> *Kerr’s Melbourne Almanac and Port Phillip Directory*, 1841, 1842; *Port Phillip Separation Merchants’ and Settlers’ Almanac, Diary and Melbourne Directory for 1845*; JJ Moritz, *Port Phillip Almanac and Directory for 1847*.

<sup>11</sup> *Directory*, 1851.

<sup>12</sup> RGO, Memorials:- Sydney 319, 956, 1038; D635; E112; W470, 471.

<sup>13</sup> Registrar General’s Office, Memorial W470

<sup>14</sup> Government Gazette 1854

<sup>15</sup> Government Gazette 1858

century. With M Moloney and I&A Moss, both to his south, he was probably the only original Crown grantee to remain on his land. Other Pywheitjorrk farmers who purchased early and also raised families in the area were J Kerr to the south, and M Paine, G Missen and (the much larger) Isaac Gidney to the north.<sup>16</sup>

For these farmers 'Mt Cottrell' (as the area was called) was their livelihood and community. Something of this life is revealed in an incident involving the Scarborough family. On the 9<sup>th</sup> August 1861 George Scarborough's son Henry - a 'Mt Cotterill farmer' - was travelling along Mt Cotterill Road on his way home from Melton, where he had been 'playing music at a dance'. He was met there by three men who tied him to a wire fence and attempted to steal his pony.<sup>17</sup> The men had been on a rampage through the area, holding up hotels in Sunbury and the Union Hotel in Sydenham (at the junction of the 'Ballarat and Rockbank roads'), at the same time robbing farms that they passed. After leaving Scarborough, they visited a Joseph Scott's farm 'on Exford Road', and then, notoriously, Henry Cropley's farm 'on Footscray Road', where they assaulted Mrs Cropley and servant girl Mary Egan. Their crimes incited outrage. The men were caught soon afterwards, and two - Johnson and Saunders - were hanged.<sup>18</sup>

Land records reveal that on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1873 George Scarborough conveyed the 222 acre Mt Cottrell Road property to his son Henry for the nominal sum of £200.<sup>19</sup> George died on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1880.

Henry Scarborough married Mary Ann Swords, daughter of the editor of the Bacchus Marsh *Guardian*. Local memorialist Alex Cameron records that Henry carried on 'dairying and grazing for many years at Mt Cotterell, before moving to Melbourne'. He was over over 80 years of age when he died, and together with a former Brunswick Councillor William Fleming JP, was thought to be one of the oldest two native born residents in Victoria at the time.<sup>20</sup> From various General Law land records it can be deduced that Henry died sometime between the years 1918 and 1923, so he would have been born c.1840.

Presumably Henry Scarborough and his wife, and perhaps children, had shared the house on the Mt Cottrell property with their parents and perhaps siblings for at least part of their occupation. However, by the late nineteenth century Henry had apparently had enough of trying to make a living on the dry property, and moved on. By 1888 (the oldest extant ratebook for this site) the 222 acre property, 'fenced' and with 'House etc', was leased to a James Walker 'dealer'.<sup>21</sup> Walker was no doubt a stock dealer, perhaps associated with the nineteenth century Newmarket stock agent JC Walker & Co.<sup>22</sup> He occupied the property until at least 1892,<sup>23</sup> although it is likely that he lived elsewhere.

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<sup>16</sup> Parish Plan, Parish of Pywheitjorrk; and SLV Map 821.1A (1892), Parish of Pywheitjorrk.

<sup>17</sup> Alex Cameron, 'Melton Memoirs' (Melton & District Historical Society, nd), p.15.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*; also Batey, I, RHSV manuscript (1910), pp.112-115; also Starr, J, *Melton: Plains of Promise* (Shire of Melton, nd), p.149; also Murray, E, *The Plains of Iramoo* (self-published, 1974), p.98. (Reports of the trial in the Age and Argus, October 1861, or PROV Court records might shed further light on the encounter with Scarborough.)

<sup>19</sup> RGO, General Law Memorial: Book 235, No.25.

<sup>20</sup> Cameron, *op cit*, p.13.

<sup>21</sup> Shire of Braybrook Ratebook, 1888-89.

<sup>22</sup> Peck, HH, *Memoirs of a Stockman* (Stock and Land Publishing Co, Melbourne 1972), pp.18, 25-26.

<sup>23</sup> Shire of Braybrook Ratebook, 1888-92.

By 1910 Henry Scarborough was again being rated on the property, although by this time his residence was 'Frankston'.<sup>24</sup> Other information reveals that he had lived in Flemington before taking up a farm in Cranbourne Road, Frankston. In 1918, shortly before his death, he was still listed as being a 'farmer' in Frankston.<sup>25</sup>

The house would appear then to have been untenanted when in 1911 Scarborough sold the 222 acres, with 'house etc', to John and Patrick Francis Murphy for £1554.<sup>26</sup> The Murphys were farmers from Bendigo, and this was the only landholdings they owned in the Shire of Braybrook / Melton, so it is assumed that at least one of them lived, perhaps with a family, on this property. One of the brothers may have lived approximately 1.5 kilometres further north on Mt Cottrell Road, where the ratebooks show a Margaret Murphy, occupation 'hd' (home duties) renting a c.300 acre property with buildings.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1918 Patrick Murphy died 'at his residence, Rockbank'. The probate papers show his property to have included 'crops, livestock, farming implements, carriages, harness and saddlery, plant tools etc', an 'old silver watch and gold chain', a share of the 'Murphy Bros' bank account, and also an interest of the brothers' ownership of the 222 acre property.<sup>27</sup>

Amongst the small crowd gathered at the bedside of the dying Murphy were F Charles Holden JP (then the owner of the Mt Cottrell Farm on the opposite side of the road), and Stephen Volant, a farmer to his south. They later made affidavits declaring that they knew Murphy well, and that the Will he made verbally on his deathbed was valid. His Will stated his intention to leave all of his property to his 'wife and children', and for his brother John to be sole executor.<sup>28</sup> It is likely, given the presence of near neighbours Holden and Volant, that Murphy had lived with his family in the Scarborough house on Mt Cottrell Road. His brother John may have rented the farm further north with his wife Margaret, and probably left the area the following year, as there is no ratebook entry for either a John or Margaret Murphy from this time. The presence of a house on the Scarborough property at this time is confirmed by a 1916 map.<sup>29</sup>

The property had never been issued a Torrens title, and there had obviously been some irregularity in the 1911 sale of the property from Scarborough to the Murphys because the issue was still being canvassed in 1926 legal deeds pertaining to the property. It appears however that in December 1918, at the same time as probate was granted, John Murphy sold the property to Frederick Charles Thomas Holden for £1970.<sup>30</sup> Holden at this time was the owner of the c.1400 acre 'Mt Cottrell' property opposite. In 1923 Holden mortgaged the 222 acre 'Scarborough' property for £1700.<sup>31</sup>

Throughout this time the ratebooks describe the property as having a 'house', or sometimes, 'buildings'. It may or may not have been occupied at this time; Holden would have lived in the Mt Cottrell property opposite, and the ratebooks record that he did not let the whole property out, but he may still have let the house out (without the land), perhaps to one of his farm workers.

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<sup>24</sup> Shire of Braybrook Ratebook, 1910-11.

<sup>25</sup> RGO, General Law Memorial: Book 457 No.299; Book 517 No.904.

<sup>26</sup> RGO, General Law Memorial: Book 457 No.299; also Shire of Braybrook Ratebook, 1910-11.

<sup>27</sup> PROV, VPRS 28/P3, Unit 870 (160/765)

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*; and PROV VPRS 7591/P2, Unit 592 (160/765)

<sup>29</sup> Army Ordnance Map: 'Sunbury', 1916.

<sup>30</sup> RGO, General Law Memorial: Book 517 No.905; also Shire of Melton Ratebook, 1918-19.

<sup>31</sup> RGO, General Law Memorial: Book 517, No.906

The depression may have been responsible for the next change of ownership. Holden repaid his mortgage on the Mt Cottrell property (and probably others) in March 1930.<sup>32</sup> On the same day as he discharged its mortgage he sold the 222 acre property to Bertie Albert Thomas, of ‘Deer Park’, ‘grazier’, for £2775.<sup>33</sup>

In 1945 when Thomas sold the property his address was still Deer Park, and he was described as a ‘grazier and wholesale butcher’.<sup>34</sup> Thomas then did not live on this property, but at Deer Park (closer to Newmarket). Although a 1933 map still shows a house on the site, it would have been very old by this time, and may not have been occupied at all, or perhaps occasionally by Thomas (on visiting the property) or a tenant.<sup>35</sup> While the property was still listed in the 1931 ratebook as including ‘buildings’, by 1938 the ratebook no longer referred to any building or house on the property.<sup>36</sup> The house may have been derelict, and perhaps even demolished, during this period.

The property could not have been too successful for Thomas’ grazing business, as in July 1945 he sold it to William Ernest Paine Collins, of a local farming family, for £2220, considerably less than he had paid for it in the depression years.<sup>37</sup> Collins lived on Mt Cottrell Road, a short distance south of the property. Throughout this period the 222 acre allotment was not listed as having buildings.<sup>38</sup> William Collins died on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1973, and in 1993 Allotment 2 (111 acres) was sold by his family to Oupan Resources, who immediately conveyed it to Darra Exploration Pty Ltd.<sup>39</sup> Readymix Holdings Pty Ltd obtained an interest in the property in 2003.<sup>40</sup>

The property has previously been identified as a possible sheep wash or sheep dip.<sup>41</sup> Sheep washing was an early pastoral practice, and our knowledge of sheep wash structures is far from complete. If it was the remains of a sheep wash, it would be of very high significance on the grounds of rarity alone. But also because the question of ‘washing’ (rather than shearing ‘in the grease’), together with ‘breeding’, were the two great subjects debated by nineteenth century pastoralists.<sup>42</sup>

It is possible that the site was a sheep wash, established by the Scarboroughs on their dairying and grazing farm. But circumstantial evidence does not support this possibility:- except for the Holden ownership c.1918-30, the property is not known ever to have been associated with a

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<sup>32</sup> The 1929-30 Shire of Melton Ratebook shows that he was living on a c.300 acre property elsewhere in Rockbank.

<sup>33</sup> RGO, General Law Memorial: Book 533 No.619.

<sup>34</sup> RGO, General Law Memorial: Book 580 No.359

<sup>35</sup> Army Ordnance Map, ‘Sunbury’, January 1933.

<sup>36</sup> Shire of Melton Ratebooks, 1930-31, 1937-38.

<sup>37</sup> RGO, General Law Memorial: Book 580 No.359. Note: former local Albert Evans, in an annotated sketch map of the Rockbank - Truganina area ‘To the 1969 fires’, provides different information on the site in this period. His annotation for what appears to be this site is: ‘Mick Cochrane general farming, sold out during the war’.

<sup>38</sup> Shire of Melton Ratebooks, 1945-46, 1950-51

<sup>39</sup> RGO, General Law Memorial: Book 894 No.95; Book 895 No.496

<sup>40</sup> Titles Office, AP108758K

<sup>41</sup> Johnson, C, *Rural Heritage Study; Western Region of Melbourne* (Context Pty Ltd, Melbourne Western Region Inc, 1994), pp.117, 124-126. There is a little confusion as to whether this is actually the site considered in this study as M12, ‘Stone Yards & Sheep Wash’.

<sup>42</sup> Allom Lovell Sanderson Pty Ltd and Jessie Serle, ‘Werribee Park Metropolitan Park: Conservation Analysis’ (MMBW, December 1985), pp.115-117

pastoral property of a size that would be expected to practise sheep washing; sheep washing was an early pastoral practice which had died out in the late nineteenth century and is unlikely to have been practiced at the time of Holden's ownership; and, although the dam is situated on a drainage line, there is no creek or stream on the property, as was ordinarily associated with a sheep wash. At this stage no historical evidence has been found of a shearing shed having been built on the property adjacent to the sheep wash as would be expected. An unlined dam would not have been a sheep dip. Mrs Mary Collins, of the family that owned the property c.1945-1973, is reported to have advised that in her time the property had simply been sheep yards rather than a sheep dip or wash; sheep-washing was not practised in the area in the twentieth century.<sup>43</sup>

The reason for the unusually configured stock yards is not known. More detailed physical investigation (archaeological, and perhaps with the assistance of local farmers) is likely to reveal more information. It might be that further historical evidence (eg from descendents of owners of the site) can also be obtained. The historical evidence to date is that the property was used for grazing, dairying, and perhaps cropping at different stages. It is likely that the long stone-lined dam at the end of a long stock race was simply a dam, built over a shallow gully below Mt Cottrell, and essential for the survival of stock (especially dairy cattle) on a property without any stream frontage. The unusual stock race may have been necessary to facilitate and control stock access to the dam, and perhaps link it with stock yards or milking shed (perhaps built previously) near the home site. It is possible too that it does not date to the Scarborough era. Similarly, some of the dry stone walls appear to have been repaired (and possibly built originally) with roughly squared stones, and split stones, that were perhaps recycled from original buildings on site that were likely demolished in the 1930s. Neighbour Mr John Morton suggests that Bob Barkley, who lived about 400 metres south of the property, did a lot of stone wall repairing in the district around the 1950s (although not a trained or professional waller), and is likely to have had a hand in any work done about this time.<sup>44</sup>

### *History of Underground Tanks*

Underground tanks were a typical component of nineteenth century rural properties in Victoria, and illustrate a form of water collection and infrastructure no longer practised.

Provision of a domestic water supply was critical to the establishment of any rural property that was not beside a permanent supply of water. 'The first essential was to secure a reliable water supply. Unless the farm bordered a permanent creek ... the selector had to dig a dam for his animals and a well [sic] for the household supply.'<sup>45</sup> Especially in low-rainfall Melton, domestic water storage was critical, and relics of these systems is a key part of the heritage of the Shire. Many underground domestic 'wells' (as they are usually called) around Melton are in fact 'tanks' which, rather than tapping groundwater, were sealed cisterns for the storage of water from the roofs of buildings.

Underground tanks became only generally necessary in Australia from the 1850s, when increased population and Crown land sales ensured that many dwellings were unable to locate beside a stream. At the same time, as a result of the goldrushes, the mass introduction into Australia of the new product 'corrugated iron' made it feasible for ordinary people to be able to

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<sup>43</sup> John Beaty, personal conversation, 8/5/2002. John also suggested that William Collins sons may have built the walls. Also John Morton, personal conversation, 19/7/2006.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*

<sup>45</sup> Cannon, Michael, *Life in the Country: Australia in the Victorian Age: 2* (Nelson, West Melbourne, 1978), p.149



channel water into the underground tanks from roofs and guttering.<sup>46</sup> Underground tanks on small properties generally seem to have been located at the rear of the house; this might have enabled the roof runoff from dairy and other nearby farm outbuildings to also feed the tank. The construction of wells goes back thousands of years, and designs for underground wells and tanks, such as contained in JC Loudon's *Encyclopaedia of Agriculture*, had been available to English farmers since at least the early nineteenth century.<sup>47</sup> These generally advocated cigar shaped cross-sections, with the domed top being mostly underground. This shape was also used in Australia, but on Melton rural properties they do not appear to have been used on early farms. Instead, the early tanks had vertical walls, and no domed covers. Most appear to have been constructed of local stone rather than brick, and without a low wall (as in romantic images of European wells) to ensure safety. Isolation and cost probably meant that they may have been sunk by the property-owners, at least in the case of early small farms. Examples of such tanks on small farms are the former Scarborough and Moloney properties on Mount Cottrell Road (Place Nos.293 and 292) which were constructed of bluestone in the 1850s and 1871, and for which no evidence of a cover remains. In terms of larger early (1850s) properties, *Glen Elgin* (Place No.39) has a low timber-framed gabled roof, clad in corrugated iron; and the tanks of *Tibbermore* (Place No.392), Mount Ida (Place No.002) and the Diggers Rest Hotel (Place No.067) both have flat corrugated iron covers on raised stone sides. (These covers, and sides, might have been added later, as gradual modernisation of the tanks was common.)

While domes were advocated in early British architectural literature, they appears to have only begun to be built in Australia in the 1860s. At that time there was a growing realisation of the dangers of uncovered wells and tanks in terms of sanitation, as well as safety. Unclean water could wash into uncovered tanks from dairies, and sometimes from cesspits, and vermin also obtained easy access:

‘The typical countrywoman of the early days hardly moved a step from her threshold “to cast away indescribable filth”. The contents of chamber pots, vegetable peelings, grease-laden water – all festered around the hut and blended with the nearby latrine to create a “peculiarly offensive” odour which attracted swarms of flies. Sometimes the fluids soaked through the soil into the well [sic], so that the family suffered from an intermittent “low typhoid” fever whose cause they did not suspect.’<sup>48</sup>

In 1885 *Martins Home and Farm* described uncovered underground tanks and wells as ‘the family rat-trap’.<sup>49</sup> ‘Common infections of the nineteenth century, such as typhoid, scarlet fever, diphtheria (which was known to have proved tragically fatal in the case of Melton’s Kerr, Moloney and Wood families), tuberculosis and gastro-enteritis, spread rapidly in many country towns .... Efficient disposal of human excreta was a major problem.’<sup>50</sup> The connection between water pollution and public health, in particular diseases like dysentery, typhoid and even cholera were beginning to be appreciated.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, technology was contributing to better health. As long as a bucket was necessary to draw water, it was not possible to cover the tops of tanks, or at best only to provide

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<sup>46</sup> Hughes, Trueman, Ludlow, ‘Wells and Underground Tanks’, prepared for the Heritage Council of NSW (nd), *passim*; Cannon, *op cit*, p.150

<sup>47</sup> J.C. Loudon, *Encyclopaedia of Agriculture*, Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman, London, 1826.

<sup>48</sup> Cannon, *op cit*, p.151

<sup>49</sup> Cited in Hughes *et al*, *op cit*, p.19.

<sup>50</sup> Cannon, *op cit*, pp.255-6

<sup>51</sup> Hughes *et al*, *op cit*, pp.19-24

a rudimentary cover. Once a small and reasonably priced pump became available there was no further need for an open tank. The availability of domestic hand-pumps grew in the 1850s, and by 1860 NSW public buildings (schools and railway stations) specified domes as the standard form of construction for tanks.<sup>52</sup> It is also highly likely that the increasing access to good quality bricks, professional bricklaying skills, and cement, over the course of the late nineteenth century contributed to the proliferation of covered tanks in places like Melton.

The new tanks were still circular in plan, but constructed of brick, with approximately 9 inches of clay puddle behind the brick wall to keep the tank water-tight. The hemispherical dome, or segment of a dome, was also constructed with bricks. Both the interior of the tank, and the exterior of the dome, were cement rendered according to recommended practice.<sup>53</sup> Without internal inspection it is not known whether the cross-section of the tanks typically remained vertical, or cigar-shaped, which were both described in textbooks. Numerous domes in Melton appear to be segmental spheres, rather than hemispheres, and may have spread underneath the surface to a wider diameter tank cylinder, as per the textbooks. The domes were provided with a manhole on top (covered with a concrete cover), of minimum width 16 inches, to provide access for cleaning. Mr Jeff Robinson of Melton West recalls entering the tank on the family farm to repair internal render.<sup>54</sup> The opening also enabled the cool water to be used for refrigeration: perishables and jellies (for setting) were lowered into the water in a bucket.<sup>55</sup>

The only known Australian heritage study of underground tanks (conducted in NSW), claims that they were only superseded by the familiar corrugated iron tanks (on tankstands to provide water pressure) in the 1890s, when ‘the galvanised above-ground tank was in widespread use.’<sup>56</sup> In Victoria however Miles Lewis claims that ‘*the corrugated iron rainwater tank was manufactured in Melbourne by the later 1850s, and spread very rapidly despite claims that the zinc coating would poison the water.*’<sup>57</sup> Anders Hjorth’s recollections of Melton in the 1860s state that: ‘*The water supply was very deficient; a few had iron tanks, and some under-ground ones.*’<sup>58</sup> He may however have been referring to the square plate-metal ‘ships tanks’ (shipping containers, usually for foodstuffs, that were designed in Britain for recycling in this manner) that are most usually found these days on larger properties, rather than the larger corrugated steel version that became more common. A survey of remaining underground tanks on nineteenth century Melton properties might reveal the extent to which galvanised iron (or steel) header tanks were used as an alternative. We know that underground tanks continued to be built in the early twentieth century, and that today there are many properties that have both underground tanks (most not in use) and corrugated steel header tanks. As access to hand, petroleum or electric pumps permitted, they may have been used in conjunction.

While domes probably became widespread from the 1860s for domestic use, it cannot be categorically inferred that the absence of a dome means that the tank was built before that time. On the other hand, the presence of a dome does not necessarily mean that the tank was built

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<sup>52</sup> *ibid*, pp.32-33

<sup>53</sup> Eg, Albrecht, CE, *Measurements and Dimensions of Tanks and Dams* (Melbourne, Arnell and Jackson [1885?]), pp.30-33

<sup>54</sup> Mr Jeff Robinson, personal conversation, 14/2/2006. This contradicts the Hughes *et al* survey of tanks in NSW, which found that internal render was rare in domestic tanks (pp.55-56).

<sup>55</sup> Hughes *et al*, *op cit*, pp.32-80.

<sup>56</sup> Hughes *et al*, *op cit*. (Austral Archaeology also conducted a study of early Chinese wells on the Koorong, South Australia.)

<sup>57</sup> Lewis, Miles, *Physical Investigation of a Building: National Trust Technical Bulletin 9.1* (National Trust of Australia, Victoria, 1989).

<sup>58</sup> Hjorth, Anders, ‘Recollections of Melton 1861-67’, in M&DHS Newsletter, February 2001.

after this time, as apparently the building of a dome over a tank often took place many years after the original construction.<sup>59</sup> The best assumption that can be made in terms of dating tanks is that, water being essential to habitation, they were built at or very soon after the construction of the original dwelling on a site.

So in the case of this property, it is very likely that the tank was built in the late 1850s.

Tankbuilders known to have operated in Melton Shire in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries include WA Cecil, Tom Collins (c.1890-1913), and Augustus Schebler ('known for his workmanship' according to Collins).<sup>60</sup> However such an early tank as this may have been built by the original owners of the property, the Scarboroughs.

### **Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:**

*Shire of Melton Historical Themes: 'Farming', 'Water', 'Community: Towns and People'*

*Known comparable examples in the Shire of Melton:*

There are a number of ruins of small farms in the Shire. The most comparable, in terms of their distinctive features, and dry plains contexts, and relative intactness are two in the Mt Cotterell area:

- The Kerr Farm Site, Boundary Road, Tarneit (Place No.359) is most comparable place in Melton. It is a similar complex of dry stone walls, the ruins of the original bluestone house, the remains of a covered dam (or dairy), and other dams. This place also dates to the 1850s, and also has social history associations of significance to the broader history of the Shire.
- *The Moloney Farm Site* (Site No.292). This comprises a small, neat roughly squared bluestone underground tank, pepper trees, boundary and paddock drystone walls, and the associated 'Moloneys' Water Reserve. It dates to the later Selection Act era, c.1872.

Other relatively intact farm complex sites in the area also retain different evidence of farming from the early era:

- *Rocklands* (Site 391) in Truganina. As a larger and more successful farm of Cr RD Hopkins, it is not directly comparable with the small Kerr farm. It retains a substantial bluestone homestead and associated features. It has an outstanding collection of drystone walls, and an important stone lined dam.
- *Tibbermore* (site 392). Next to and very similar to *Rocklands*. It retains a larger house, and an extensive collection of drystone walls, including some excellent examples. Its small diameter underground tank stone-lined tank is also of interest.
- *Evansdale* (Site 327): Again, this Truganina property also dates to the 1850s, and remains in the hand of the original family. It contains small houses of three, or perhaps

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<sup>59</sup> Hughes *et al*, *op cit*, p.3

<sup>60</sup> Robinson, *op cit*; also Tom Collins memoirs, part of which were reproduced in the M&DSH Newsletter of December 2000.

four eras, including early ones of rubble stone construction, in semi-ruinous condition. It also has some drystone wall stock yards and fences and pepper trees.

Other sites that might compare with the dairy, or cistern on the Kerr property are:-

- The former Condon property (Site 19) in the north of the Shire, which retains a stone outbuilding (recently repaired) with three stone steps at the entrance.
- Site No.12, said to have been associated with a Cobb & Co stable, may have been a dairy; it is also set one or two steps down.

**Condition:**

The place is a ruin and archaeological site.

**Integrity:**

The place is a ruin, and archaeological site, whose integrity has not been diminished by subsequent development (other than the original pastoral-farming pursuits).

**Recommendations:**

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay, and the Victorian Heritage Inventory.

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

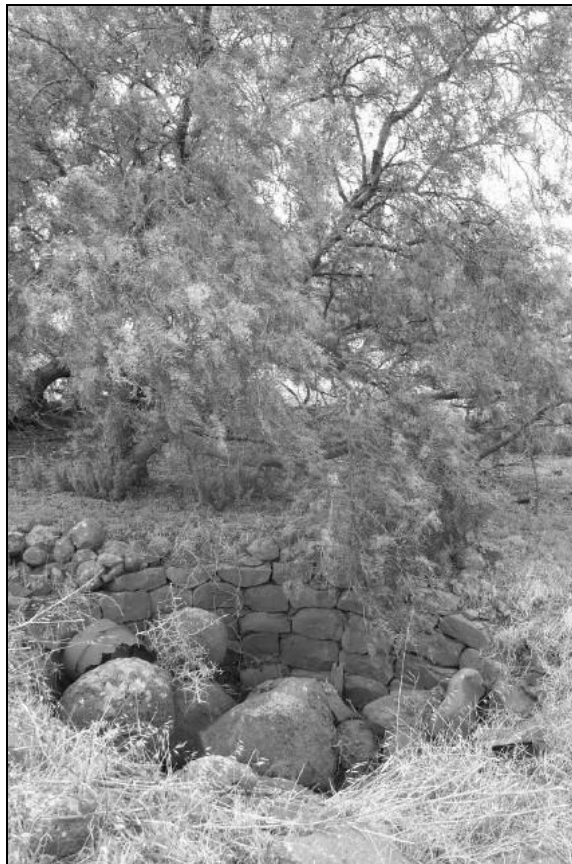
|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| External Paint Controls:      | <i>No</i>                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Internal Alteration Controls: | <i>No</i>                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Tree Controls:                | <i>Yes</i> :- Mature Peppercorn and Sugar Gums                                                                                                                                          |
| Outbuildings and/or Fences:   | <i>Yes</i> : Dry stone wall stockyards, underground tank, ruins of house, dry stone boundary walls along Griegs Road and Mount Cottrell Roads and western boundary wall to Greigs Road. |

Other Recommendations:

- It is recommended that a Conservation Management Plan be undertaken for the whole site, including an archaeological study, be conducted for the place. It would be desirable for the place (zoned Public Park and Recreation Zone) to be interpreted and available for public use.
- It is recommended that the internal arrangement of walls be recorded, mapped and investigated prior to any development that might require the demolition of any walls.



**The ruins of the Scarborough's rubble bluestone house.**



**The partly filled bluestone-lined well.**