

Heritage Overlay No.: 119
Citation No.: 457
Place: House, 107-121 Water Reserve Road

Other Names of Place: O’Neills Water Reserve
Location: 107-121 Water Reserve Road, Rockbank
Critical Dates: Original construction of main house c.1913;
Construction of cottage c.1900; Extension to main house late twentieth century.
Existing Heritage Listings: None
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

The house at 107-121 Water Reserve Road, Rockbank, is significant as a moderately-intact example of a Edwardian style with interwar styled windows. This dwelling represents one of three Edwardian/Federation dwellings in the Melton Shire with interwar design overtones. Built c.1913, the house also has a later hipped roof addition to one side. Also on the site is an earlier Victorian vernacular cottage that also contributes to the significance of the place. It is also a good representative example of the small farms created as a result of the break-up of the Clarke *Rockbank* pastoral estate, a watershed event in the history of Melton Shire.

The house at 107-121 Water Reserve Road is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC D.2). Although altered and extended, the house still clearly demonstrates original design

qualities of an Edwardian style with interwar styled windows. The design qualities include the asymmetrical composition, single storey height, hipped roof form and the side gable that projects towards the front, together with the return convex verandah. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the horizontal timber weatherboard wall cladding, galvanised corrugated steel roof cladding, narrow eaves with paired timber brackets, multi-corbelled brick chimney, timber fretwork verandah valance, timber framed double hung windows arranged in banks of three and the front timber framed doorway with sidelights and highlights. The adjacent Victorian vernacular styled cottage also contributes to the significance of the place.

The house at 107-121 Water Reserve Road is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A.4). It is a good representative and increasingly scarce remaining example of a rural weatherboard house built in Melton Shire in the first few decades of the twentieth century as a result of the increasing rural prosperity and historic changes of the era. In particular it is a good representative example of farming homesteads created as a result of the break-up of the Clarkes' massive *Rockbank* estate, which was a major turning point in the history of the Shire. The place is also associated with the important history of dairy farming, and water reserves, in the Shire.

Overall, the house off Water Reserve Road is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

The house at 107-121 Water Reserve Road, Rockbank, is set in a rural location with views to the adjacent water reserve. The house is surrounded by open grassed areas punctuated with beds of shrubs and flowers and some trees, and rear outbuildings associated with the former Chickadee Poultry Farm.

The asymmetrical, single storey, horizontal timber weatherboard, Edwardian styled dwelling is characterised by a hipped roof form, together with a gable that projects towards the front. On the other side of the gable roof is a slightly lower hipped roof wing that appears to be a later addition. There is an original convex return verandah, together with a similar verandah on the later work. These verandahs are supported by timber posts with framed timber fretwork valances. A multi-corbelled painted brick chimney adorns the roofline. Narrow overhangs with paired timber brackets are features of the eaves.

The timber framed double hung windows arranged in banks of three on the original building appear to represent changes during the interior period, as these windows are reflective of that era. Similar windows have been constructed in the later work. The raised concrete verandah floor also appears to have been introduced, as has the timber finial and truss in the gable end.

Another early design quality of the dwelling is the front timber framed doorway with sidelights and highlights.

On the north side of the dwelling is a small cottage that may represent an earlier building on the site. This Victorian vernacular styled horizontal timber weatherboard dwelling has a simple gable roof form with a skillion verandah at the front. The roof forms are clad in galvanised corrugated steel. There is an early central timber framed doorway at the front and flanking timber framed double hung windows.

History:

Contextual History

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

The house is situated on the original Crown Allotment 2A and part of 2B of Section 8A, Parish of Kororoit.¹

An early map (1854) describes the land along the Kororoit Creek south of the Melton Highway as ‘good arable land’, well watered, and (adjacent to the present 107 Water Reserve Road) ‘fine agricultural land’. These descriptions contrast dramatically with the vast majority of the parishes of Holden, Kororoit and Maribyrnong on the same map, which are described as grazing country, often ‘very stony in places’.²

The property on Water Reserve Road then was unusually good farming land for the Melton district. It was withheld from the early (1850s) Crown sales, and used as the Melton Farmers Common.

Much of the land in this area was used for dairying. However in the early 1860s ‘that dreadful disease, pluro-pneumonia.’ struck the cattle herds.³ John Chandler records that in 1863 he had:

‘... lost some very nice heifers on the Common. They got the disease and died, and I had to leave them all, for I dared not bring them home, as my other cattle would have caught the disease. I raised a good many pigs this year, and made them into bacon.’⁴

Local farm labourer and carrier Anders Hjorth also records the appearance of the ‘dread disease’ pleuro-pneumonia among the herds grazing on the Farmers Common to the east of Melton.⁵ By 1863-64 the West Bourke Agriculture Inspector noted that pleuro-pneumonia had not been so virulent but, still, he had met a ‘gentleman’ who had lost 27 of his best milkers to the disease.⁶

The exceptional drought continued through the 1865-66 season: ‘...most disastrously felt over the whole line of the plain country, extending from Essendon to the Djerriwarrh Creek.’ There was still the occasional loss of cattle to pleuro-pneumonia. The hoped-for advantages of the ‘commonages’ to dairy farmers had been disappointed, said the inspector, as they were always overstocked during the growing months, and in drought the ‘wretched cattle’ must die of starvation, said the agricultural inspector.⁷

In the 1860s, farmers commons and many timber and water reserves around Victoria were seen to have done their job in helping to the first farmers to establish, and were put up for sale. In the late 1860s this property was accordingly opened up for sale under the provisions of the Selection Acts.⁸ John Samuel White, ‘farmer’ of Melton was the successful applicant for the 40 acre CA

¹ Parish Plan, Parish of Kororoit.

² ‘Portions Marked in the Parishes of Holden, Kororoit and Maribyrnong, Count of Bourke’ (15th May 1854), SLV Houghton I 29.

³ Peel, L, *Rural Industry in the Port Phillip Region, 1835-1880*, (MUP, 1974), p.90; also Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1864, p.94

⁴ Chandler, John, *Forty Years in the Wilderness*, p.175 (The bacon paid well and saved him. Newnham had purchased rice damaged in a fire at a Melbourne rice mill and sold some to his cousin Chandler for raising pigs.)

⁵ ‘Recollections of Melton 1861-67’, by Anders Hjorth, reproduced in the MDHS News Sheet, April 2001.

⁶ Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1864-65, Vol.3, p.93. The drier lands that were soon to be opened for selection on the lower Goulburn and the Wimmera were not affected by rust. Consequently, wheat growing soon moved north from the 1850s farming areas such as Port Phillip and Kyneton.

⁷ Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1867, Vol.3, 1st Session, pp.83-84.

⁸ Parish Plan, Parish of Kororoit:- Land File No.11157/31

2A, ahead of four other applicants.⁹ In 1869 he also applied, apparently unsuccessfully, to include some of the Water Reserve in his allotment, to give stock access to the water and ‘the only camping place for cattle.’ In 1869, the Board recommended that White be granted both of the 20 acre portions of CA 2A. His improvements in 1872 were listed as 35 chains of post & wire fencing, and 6 chains of stone wall. Notably, no buildings were listed.¹⁰

This sale of the Melton Common however occurred at a very bad time for farming in the district, with continued severe drought, pleuro-pneumonia, and rust and caterpillars in the crops. The 1860s in fact marked a turning point in the whole district, with many small farmers failing and leaving for New Zealand, or the new lands that were being opened on the Lower Goulburn.

Statistics show a dramatic decline in population during the 1860s, which abated only marginally in the 1870s despite the new lands being opened for Selection.¹¹ The number of land holdings also in the district fell by 30% between 1860-81 as properties were progressively purchased by neighbouring farmers or graziers, especially WJT (‘Big’) Clarke.¹²

One of the allotments acquired by Clarke to incorporate into his massive *Rockbank* estate was the subject site. An 1892 map shows that by this time Sir WJ Clarke owned virtually all of the ‘fine agricultural land’ on both sides of the Kororoit Creek, from Leakes Road to Mount Cotterell Road, and between Rockbank Road and the Melton Highway. (The single allotment he didn’t own was in the possession of another large pastoralists, William Taylor of *Overnewton*.)¹³ This included all of the original Melton Farmers Common allotments.¹⁴

By the end of the nineteenth century however historical changes were afoot. In addition to new taxes and the inherent difficulties of the pastoral industry, a new generation of farmers was restlessly surveying the vast pastoral estates about them. After Sir WJ Clarke’s death in 1897, his son Sir Rupert Turner Havelock Clarke Bart. inherited his title, estate and membership of Parliament. In that year he mused in Parliament about cutting up 40,000 acres of the Clarke estate to lease to dairy farmers. He was under some local pressure to make land available for farming, and declared himself keen not to ‘disappoint public expectations.’¹⁵ The Victorian Municipal Directory 1898 entry for Melton Shire made the first of a series of unprecedented reports on movements by big local landholders such as Rupert Clarke, Harry Werribee Staughton, and Harvey Patterson to sell and lease (often under the ‘share system’) large portions of their estates to small farmers and graziers.¹⁶

This ‘break-up’ of the large estates coincided with major developments in farming in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as new science, technologies, fertilisers, transport and markets enabled huge productivity increases. With inventions such as the Babcock separator, the development of local co-operative creameries and butter factories, and advances in refrigeration creating new export markets, dairying in particular boomed.

⁹ PROV VPRS 627/P0/131 (The first of the applicants, in 1868, was Henry Gidney, probably a relation [and perhaps an agent] of the I Gidney who in the late nineteenth century possessed a large Rockbank estate used for breeding horses for the Indian market.)

¹⁰ PROV VPRS 627/P0/131

¹¹ Peel, *op cit.*, p 80. (Peel’s ‘Sunbury’ area, from Bacchus Marsh to Craigieburn, including Melton)

¹² Peel, *op cit.*, pp.127-135; also Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1862-63, Vol.4, pp.50-53

¹³ Shire Map Series (1892), Parish of Kororoit

¹⁴ Shire of Braybrook, Ratebooks; Shire Map Series 1892, Parish of Kororoit

¹⁵ *Sunbury News*: 31/7/1897, 7/8/1897, 4/9/1897.

¹⁶ *Victorian Municipal Directory*, 1898, and following years.

And so the beginning of the twentieth century marked a major new era in the history of Melton. In 1905-06 Clarke's grandson, Sir Rupert Turner Havelock Clarke Bart., Clarke began subdividing and disposing of the vast *Rockbank* estate (and most of *Rupertswood-Red Rock* and *Bolinda Vale* estates) that had been so carefully acquired and tendered by his grandfather and father.¹⁷ While much of his land was subsequently purchased by established neighbouring farmers and smaller graziers, it also provided the opportunity for new farming families to make a living in the district.¹⁸

History of the Place

Joseph Fraser ran a dairy farm on 107 Water Reserve Road for a number of years as a tenant of the Clarkes. Fraser also leased the 20 acres of Crown Land (water reserve) at an annual rental of 6/- a year. The rate records indicate that the property was fully fenced, but still there are no buildings recorded on the land.¹⁹ So the small weatherboard house was definitely not erected at this time; however it is possible that the (former) small bluestone dairy may date to this era. But it is more likely that both buildings were constructed after Clarke had sold the land, in the early twentieth century.

In 1897 John William and Denis Casey from the Learmonth district were running a dairy farm that had been established by John Purchase in 1863 on the Western Highway (west of the present site). In about 1870 Purchase had sold out to Clarke and moved to the Whittlesea area, and Clarke leased it to the Caseys. John William Casey and his wife Mary had nine children. He was a Councillor in both the Braybrook and Melton Shire Councils, and President of the local branch Australian Natives Association for many years. He was also an ardent supporter of the 'water for Melton scheme' participating in the many activities arranged to attempt to secure permanent water for the district; although he lived until 90 he did not see the scheme fulfilled.²⁰

The Caseys' Western Highway farm was successful.²¹ By 1904, they had established a dairy, hay and cropping farm of 134 acres near O'Neills Water Reserve, to the north of the present property, on land recently sold by Clarke (CA5, Section 13).

Ratebooks suggest that Denis Casey obtained ownership of the present site between 1911 and 1916, at which time it was described as 10 acres 'and house'.²² It is likely that the stone dairy (now demolished) and the associated cottage was in existence when he purchased the site, probably built by a previous owner or tenant. The current owners advise that no bluestone dairy was ever present on the property, but there was one present to the north along the Kororoit

¹⁷ Michael Clarke, *'Big' Clarke* (Queensberry Hill Press, Melbourne, 1980), *passim*; Sir RTH Clarke Bart. sold the vast section of the Rockbank Estate that lay south of the Western Highway in November 1906; it would appear that he sold the northern portion about a year earlier. (PROV VPRS 560/P0, 35850); also CT Vol.3211 Fol.642206, pertaining to an 8000 acre portion south part of this estate; and also Shire of Melton Ratebooks from 1905-06 which record local farmers as owners of parts of the *Rockbank* estate.)

¹⁸ Melton gained one of its most famous sons, Hector Fraser, international trap shooter, when his father John Fraser came to the area 'when the Rockbank station was cut up into farms (Alex Cameron, 'Melton Memoirs', p.20)

¹⁹ Shire of Braybrook, *Ratebooks*.

²⁰ Mrs Veronica Fitzpatrick, Bacchus Marsh, grand-daughter, August 2005

²¹ The Caseys sold the farm to Gaitskill, and its hill is now known as Gaitskill's Hill; the Gillespies later owned it for many years. (Mary Tolhurst, Judith Bilszta).

²² Shire of Braybrook, *Ratebooks*. The property is described in 1915-16 as CA 2A Section 7A, but as there is no such allotment, this is probably a mistake and should read CA 2A Section 8A (which he definitely is shown as owning in the later ratebooks).

Creek.²³ By 1926, after JW Casey had moved to Toolern, Denis Casey was described as the owner of this ten acres plus the 134 acre CA 5 Section 13 to its north.²⁴ He was still in ownership of these properties in 1936.²⁵

The valuation of the subject property at 107 Water Reserve Road does not increase notably after 1915. Denis Casey was married and it is likely that the main house on the present site was built by him between 1911 and 1915.

Following the death of his wife in 1946, Denis Casey sold his property. The property was purchased by Stella Annie Cockbill on 18 October 1946 (Title no. 2041385).²⁶

The property was then purchased from the Estate of Mrs Cockbill in 1960, by her daughter and son-in-law. The owner advises that the property was sold to Stella Anne Cockbill, the mother of the current owner, Mrs Bambery. The Bambery family then operated for many years as the Chickadee Egg and Poultry Farm, and Chicken hatchery. In recent years the Bambery family have sympathetically extended the main house.²⁷

The small weatherboard building may have been a small cottage which, with the formerly adjacent stone dairy (demolished), were built prior to Denis Casey's acquisition of the property by an earlier dairy-farmer earlier in the twentieth century.

The conjecture that the small weatherboard and stone buildings were part of a Clarke outstation seems much less likely, given the relatively late acquisition of the land by the Clarkes, and the apparent use of this property, and surrounding lands, for small farming even during the Clarke era.

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Melton Historical Themes: 'Farming'

Known Comparable Examples:

Historical comparison:

The sale of the vast Clarke pastoral estate as small farms in the early twentieth century was a turning point in the history of Melton Shire. Only 24 houses and substantial sites associated with this event now remain. Of these places, heritage citations have been prepared for 11 places, including this house at 107 Water Reserve Road. These places are:

Places for which heritage controls are proposed:

Place No.438	House, <i>Bonnie Doon</i> , Rockbank (1906)
Place No.120	House, <i>Gollers Court</i> , Melton Highway Sydenham (1906-11)
Place No.372	House, 63 Greigs Rd, Rockbank (c.1910)

²³ Mr George Bambery, personal conversation, June 2007.

²⁴ Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1925-26

²⁵ Shire of Melton, *Ratebooks*, 1935-36

²⁶ George Bambery, personal conversation, May 2007

²⁷ George Bambery, personal conversation, July 2005

Place No.360	House, <i>Mount Cottrell</i> Homestead, Rockbank (c.1910)
Place No.407	House, 1/6 Judd Court, Rockbank (c.1910): one of six houses on Clarke Estate reputedly by the same builder (c.1910)
Place No.237	House, 2120 Ryans Road, Melton: one of six houses on Clarke Estate reputedly by the same builder; with scarce hand-pump still attached to underground tank (c.1914)
Place No.457	House (former Casey), Water Reserve Road, Rockbank
Place No.102	House, <i>Arrunga</i> (early 20C)
Place No.075	House, 2-180 Davis Road, Diggers Rest (c.1914).
Place No.152	House, <i>Plumpton Park</i> , Diggers Rest (c.1922)
Place No.103	House (Tyquins), 932 Holden Road, Diggers Rest (1931)

Places for which heritage controls are not proposed:

Place No.084	House, 219 Diggers Rest – Coimadai Road, Diggers Rest
Place No.470	House, Beattys Road, Rockbank, much altered
Place No.401	House, <i>Fairview Park</i> , 686 Leakes Road, Rockbank (1905-08)
Place No.315	House, Beatty's Road, Rockbank (early 20C)
Place No.456	House, Water Reserve Road, Rockbank (c.1900-10, 1960s)
Place No.299	House, <i>Penlee Farm</i> , Mount Cottrell Road, Mount Cottrell
Place No.348	House, <i>Kintbury</i> , 318-386 Faulkners Road, Mount Cottrell
Place No.452	House, <i>Stoneleigh</i> , Troups Road, Tarneit
Place No.453	House, <i>Camelot Lodge</i> , 230 Troups Road, Rockbank
Place No.371	House, 405 Greigs Road, Rockbank
Place No.107	Trees, Holden Road, Diggers Rest: large avenue of cypress trees, remains of <i>Lyndhurst Lodge</i> .
Place No.095	Outbuilding, bluestone blacksmith, Finches Road, Melton; date 1913 inscribed.
Place No.344	Ruinous house near Kororoit Creek, ruinous, concrete.

Most surviving Clarke estate places are located in the centre and north of the Shire, in the Parishes of Kororoit and Holden. In the southern parishes of Derrimut and Pywhietjorrk, which

were vast Clarke landholdings, only eight places survive, two of which are recommended for heritage controls.

Architectural Comparison:

The Edwardian design and timber construction of the dwelling off the Water Reserve Road, Rockbank – with interwar styled timber framed windows – is not completely unusual in the Melton Shire. Other similar Edwardian and Federation style examples with interwar design overtones include:

- House, 1/6 Judd Court, (Place Id. 407): this dwelling has a steeply pitched gambrel roof form with projecting minor gables and a return verandah. There are also interwar styled timber framed double hung windows.
- *Arunga*, 3 Holden Road (Place Id. 102), Diggers Rest: a Federation styled dwelling with prominent face brick multi-corbelled chimneys, the house has a central hipped roof form and projecting gables at the front and side linked by a return bullnosed verandah. The verandah is supported by turned timber posts and has timber fretwork valances. The box windows are distinctively interwar in design, being timber framed and double hung, and arranged in banks of three.
- *Kuloomba*, 2187 Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road (Place Id. 24): a late Federation styled dwelling have a steeply pitched gambrel roof form and projecting gables at the front and side linked by a return bullnosed verandah. The gable infill (battening and panelling) is interwar in design, as are the paired timber framed double hung windows.

Possibly the most intact example of an Edwardian or Federation style in the Melton Shire constructed in horizontal timber weatherboards is the house at 111 Davis Street. It has a central steeply pitched hipped roof form and projecting front and side gables linked by a return broken back verandah. The verandah valance, timber framed casement windows arranged in banks and at the corner under the verandah, face brick multi-corbelled chimneys, gable infill and galvanised corrugated steel roof cladding represent the intact fabric.

Condition:

Good

Integrity:

Moderately 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>No</i>
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	<i>Adjacent Cottage</i>