

THE BARN 29 Edwin Rd. Templestowe.
REVISED CITATION Willys Keeble, September 2015

Description

The Barn, originally part of a dairy farm, now a house, has a rural Yarra parkland setting. It is a romantic gabled structure with heavy recycled and natural log timber framing, mud-brick walls and Gothic windows. The steep slate roof has board and batten gable ends, carved bargeboards and dormer windows on each side. The east facade has a herringbone brickwork band at first floor level. Above this is an extraordinary Gothic opening formed by a wishbone-shaped Red Gum branch. The interior is an open living area with a large stone fireplace and a central void to the upper floor supported by massive posts. The hydronically heated concrete floors are finished with superb, large format quarry tiles.

A large skillion extends along the south side built with mudstone quarried on site. It contains a kitchen, conservatory, bathroom and a bedroom with a north-facing window wall of cedar sliding-folding doors. Gothic windows contrast with the strip clerestory windows separating the stonework from the roof structure which is externally supported by heavy timber posts.

The north side of The Barn opens to a concrete terrace with formed spoon drains which was the floor of the former milking shed. The terrace is sheltered on the west by the surviving mud-brick shed wall, and looks over a garden enclosed with stone-faced walls, originally the milking yard, which retains the cow alley at its north east corner. The small dairy outbuilding beautifully executed in random rubble Warrandyte stone, (now a studio-bedroom), completes the picturesque ensemble.

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History of Place.

The original site of 29 Edwin Rd. was 70 acres fronting the Yarra in part of Crown Allotment D, Section 18, Parish of Bulleen. It was purchased by Donald Finlay Fergusson Thomson in 1944 (1) soon after his medical discharge from the R.A.A.F. From the mid-1930's, Thomson, his first wife and family lived almost directly across the Yarra River at "Worlingworth", on about 15 acres. This c1922 house survives at 10-26 Banoon Rd. Eltham (2).

Thomson acquired the Templestowe land for dairying assisted by the Soldier Settlement scheme (3). He designed the small stone dairy, built by Italian master mason Tony Zearo who had rebuilt many churches in post WW1 Europe. The slate-roofed mud-brick and timber Barn, designed and built by Thomson about 1948, was modelled on the concept of a medieval 'tithing barn' with the upper floor as a possible storeroom for his academic collection. A mud-brick skillion milking shed was attached to the north side with a milking yard in front. The southern skillion, built of mudstone quarried on the land, was intended as workshop and studio spaces. This, and the barn, remained partly unfinished for 38 years. Window and door openings lacked joinery and the south skillion and fireplace were incomplete. Some of the small Gothic timber windows had been fabricated but not installed.

The building bears some resemblance to Justus Jorgenson's early Montsalvat buildings in Eltham, especially the carved bargeboards. Donald Thomson was aware of Jorgenson's work and was a colleague of Eltham artist and anthropologist Percy Leeson. However Thomson's daughter Elaine maintains her father was more influenced by his appreciation of American adobe construction and medieval barns in Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire.

The Thomsons' farming activities supported Donald Thomson's anthropological expeditions and overseas research travel. His heavy academic workload prevented him completing the Barn building. His second wife Dorita ran the dairy farm from 1955, milking twice daily. The Thomsons continued living at "Worlingsworth" across the river. By the 1960's the Templestowe land was used to raise beef cattle instead of dairying. After Donald Thomson's death in 1970 the MMBW resumed a large section of the farm as a Public Conservation and Resource Zone. In 1985 Thomson's widow Dorita subdivided and sold much of the remaining land (4). The proceeds enabled her to complete The Barn as a house and convert the dairy to a studio-bedroom. Some building work was completed prior to her engaging architects Kevin Borland and Bernard Brown to prepare building permit drawings to satisfy the Council Building Surveyor who was opposed to mud brick house construction (5). Structural details were provided by consulting engineers Beauchamp Lewis (6). The milking shed was removed and new glazed doorways inserted in the north wall, the stone fireplace was completed with a tall rendered brick chimney. The concrete floor was tiled with hydronic heating underneath. Dorita Thomson and her daughters designed and supervised the work including the door and window joinery, herringbone brickwork and a spiral staircase to the upper floor. The south skillion was completed with stone from the 1948 quarry site, by permission of Ray Marginson, then MMBW chairman (7). The mudstone walls could not be loadbearing. The independent skillion roof structure with clerestory glazing was a Modernist contribution by architects Borland and Brown to the final design. Many other aspects of their 1986 plans were not followed by the Thomson family who, in completing and adapting the 1948 building, paid careful homage to Donald Thomson's original vision.

Donald Finlay Fergusson Thomson (1901-1970) was a highly notable anthropologist, zoologist, photographer and journalist. His field work from 1928 until 1965 resulted in a vast collection of notes, artefacts, natural science specimens, film and photographs recording the cultural dimensions of Aboriginal society in Cape York, Arnhem Land and Central Australia. He advocated for Aboriginal rights with the Commonwealth Government and sought to protect the integrity of Arnhem Land by excluding non-Aboriginal people (8).

Thomson was a polymath whose ability in farming, building design and construction is demonstrated at 29 Edwin Rd. Templestowe. He was a Doctor of Science (University of Melbourne, 1934), also a Doctor of Anthropology (Christ's College, Cambridge, commenced 1938, completed 1950). In 1939 he was awarded the Wellcome Medal for his pioneering research in applied anthropology. During WW2 he served in the Northern Territory and New Guinea, was severely wounded and awarded the military OBE in 1945. He received several awards for his major work Economic Structure and the Ceremonial Exchange Cycle in Arnhem Land (1949) and was attached to the University of Melbourne for most of his career as a research fellow, then Professor of Anthropology (1964-8). He continued his work at the University as Emeritus Professor of Anthropology until his death.

Dorita Thomson donated Thomson's large collection of objects to the University of Melbourne while retaining the family's copyright and ownership of all his manuscripts and articles, field notes, drawings, photographs, audiotapes and maps. The Donald

Thomson Ethnohistory Collection was transferred on loan to the National Museum of Victoria in 1973. It is one of the most comprehensive and significant collections of Aboriginal cultural heritage material in the world and was placed on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World in 2008 (9).

Sources

- (1) Context Pty. Ltd. Citation for House, 29 Edwin Road Templestowe in Manningham Heritage Study, 2005 Certificate of Title Vol 6728 Fol 552
- (2) Shire of Eltham Heritage Study 1992, Context Pty.Ltd. 2009
- (3) Interview with Elaine Thomson July 2015, c1950 photographs. Land Settlement (Acquisition) Act 1943, see also Research Data Australia, Victorian Archive Centre, [Soldier Settlement Estate Development Files.](#)
- (4) Context Pty. Ltd. *ibid.* Plan of Subdivision LP 200049, approved 22.11.1985.
- (5) Richard Peterson, Doncaster and Templestowe Heritage Study 1991, mud-brick house at 152 Brackenbury St. Warrandyte.
- (6) Context Pty. Ltd. *ibid.* City of Manningham Building Permit No. 8409. The architectural and structural drawings indicate the extent of existing building fabric.
- (7) Elaine Thomson *ibid.*
- (8) Donald Thomson, A.D.B entry, 2002, amended 2012.
See also <http://dropbears.com/australia/morning-glory/donald-thomson.htm>
- (9) Museum Victoria

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Creation date c1948

Change dates 1985 - 1986

Associations

Local Themes

Dr. Donald Finlay Fergusson Thomson, anthropologist, Dorita Thomson and family

5.01 – Squatters, selectors & small farmers

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Revised Statement of Significance, Willys Keeble, 2015

What is significant?

The Barn, a mud-brick, timber and building, and the former dairy outbuilding at 29 Edwin Road, Templestowe were constructed about 1948 by highly notable anthropologist Dr. Donald Thomson on his 70 acre dairy farm. The two-storey building had two low skillions, one a mud-brick milking shed and the other built with mudstone quarried on site. The dairy is of Warrandyte sandstone with a slate roof. The stonemason was Tony Zearo. The Barn has a steep slate roof with dormer windows and decorative bargeboards. The eastern timber gable end has an extraordinary Gothic opening formed by a wishbone-shaped Red Gum branch. The Barn, partially incomplete and without window and door joinery, was finished and adapted internally to become a house in 1986 by Thomson's widow Dorita. The milking shed was removed from the north side of the barn but its concrete floor, west

wall and the stone walled milking yard and cow race remain. The dairy outbuilding is now a studio-bedroom. The noted architect Kevin Borland and his partner Bernard Brown prepared plans for the building permit. Their design for the independently supported roof structure and clerestory glazing over the mudstone skillion on the south was adopted, but the majority of the design work was carried out by Dorita Thomson and her daughters.

How is it significant?

The Barn, former dairy complex and its entire site at 29 Edwin Road, Templestowe has local historic and aesthetic significance to Manningham City.

Why is it significant?

The former dairy buildings at 29 Edwin Road, Templestowe have historic significance for their association with Dr. Donald Thomson who designed and built them for his dairy farm, a business which provided financial support for his extensive travels and research in the field of anthropology. They are rare surviving evidence of farming activities in a now extensively developed suburban area. They evoke the post-war period of building materials shortage which necessitated the use of locally available materials and owner-building. (Hercon criteria A.4, B.2, H.1)

The Barn, former dairy outbuilding and milking yard at 29 Edwin Road, Templestowe have aesthetic significance as an unusual and most picturesque design, constructed using mud-brick, slate and recycled timbers in a manner characteristic of the buildings at Montsalvat, Eltham. The stonework is of exceptional quality. (Hercon criterion E.1)

(Original Statement of Significance, Context Pty. Ltd., 2005)