

Citation No. 6 - Plumpton Road Wall

Melton Dry Stone Walls Survey:	Wall No 200
Location:	625-833 Holden Road, Plumpton; Lots 1, 2 & 3, LP 135872
Critical Dates:	Original construction sometime between 1854 –1885; considerable repair and reconstruction
Existing Heritage Listings:	Associated with HO 53
Recommended Level of Significance:	LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

The Plumpton Road Wall, built sometime between 1854 and 1885, is a remnant of a group of dry stone walls built in the northern part of the Clarke *Rockbank* station. It is significant at the LOCAL level as one of the largest and more intact remnants of a Clarke boundary wall in the Shire of Melton, and as one of a diminishing number of all-stone, dry stone walls remaining in the north of the Shire. Its significance as a demonstration of nineteenth century pastoralism in the Shire of Melton is enhanced by its link to the nearby Holden Dam, and its location in the prime sheep fattening country of the *Rockbank* estate.

The Plumpton Road Wall is historically significant at the LOCAL level. (AHC A4, B2, D2) The wall is expressive of early pastoral practices on Melbourne's western plains. It is an early *Rockbank* station boundary wall which express the Shire's seminal and dominating nineteenth century pastoral industry, and in particular the activity of nationally significant pastoralist WJT Clarke and his son Sir WJ Clarke. The wall is a boundary wall, the most common type of fence associated with a pastoral estate,

and contrasting to the walls of small farmers. It is one of few dry stone walls that were built on the prime northern part of the *Rockbank* station, used for fattening sheep prior to sale at Newmarket; its significance is enhanced by its proximity and likely former functional relationship with the nearby Holden Dam. The wall is situated on 'Plumpton Road', named after Australia's first Plumpton, and was possibly a part of WJT Clarke's pioneering coursing events in the area.

The Plumpton Road Wall is aesthetically significant at the LOCAL level. (AHC E1) The Plumpton Road wall makes a fundamental statement about human interaction with the volcanic landscape of which it is a part. Looking to the west, across grazing paddocks are views of the Mount Kororoit volcanic cone. In its original rural context the wall is a prominent feature as one drives along Plumpton Road. The wall has been repaired with a higher degree of care and skill than is evident with most of the walls in the Shire. It is now a comparatively scarce example of an all-stone wall, rather than the more typical composite wall, and in parts has excellent sculptural qualities. It expresses the historical diversity of dry stone wall construction in Victoria, and is representative of the typical style of wall in the Shire of Melton and Melbourne's west. The cypress plantation along most of the wall, while diminishing its original historical context, and constituting a potential threat to the structure, echoes and highlights the length of the wall and enhances its aesthetic quality. It is situated on one of the few north-south roads of the Shire, with good visual access to travellers.

The Plumpton Road Wall is scientifically significant at the LOCAL level. (A3, C2) It demonstrates the volcanic origin of the landscape. It is one of a group of dry stone walls and dams on Plumpton and Holden Roads that

are situated south of two unnamed former volcanic eruption points that are the likely source of the stone of the walls. The wall has the potential to yield research information regarding wall construction techniques, nineteenth century rural settlement patterns, pastoral management, and ways of life on Melbourne's western plains.

The Plumpton Road Wall is socially significant at the LOCAL level (AHC G1). It has the potential to educate the community in regard to wall construction techniques, and also nineteenth century farm management, settlement patterns, and ways of life on Melbourne's western plains.

Overall, the Plumpton Road Wall is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

The wall is situated about half way between Mount Kororoit to the west, and an unnamed Lava Shield volcano which is situated to its north (the east side of Plumpton Road).¹ These former volcanoes are the likely source of the fieldstone used in the construction of the wall. They are two of about 400 inactive eruption points that have been identified on Victoria's western volcanic plains, which stretch from the Darebin Creek to near the South Australian border. Most were active between 4.5 million and 20,000 years ago.

Mount Kororoit, a dominant feature of the Shire of Melton, is geologically of State significance. It is the archetypal example of the small complex eruption points that occur on the plains between Melbourne and Woodend. It is an unusual scoria cone in that late-stage lava flows erupted from and filled the throat and crater of the volcano, covering earlier scoria deposits. The evidence of the lava flows is seen in the rocky outcrop of lava and lava agglomerate that cap the volcano.²

The tongues of lava emanating from lava volcanoes such as these eruption points were gently effusive and slowly cooling, producing dense basalt. This basalt produces a round-shaped heavy fieldstone that is the major material seen in the majority of dry stone walls of the Shire. In contrast the less numerous 'Scoria Hills'

(the best example of which was She Oak Hill, now half quarried) were formed by more explosive and quickly cooling eruption points, which produced a more vesicular scoria, or tuff. While the vesicularity of stone from the same eruption points does vary, and there is often a mixture of dense, smooth lava stone and more honeycombed textured lava stone in the same area, this wall is strongly characterised by round smooth stones.

These smooth, round and dense stones, having less surface friction, are difficult material with which to build a dry stone wall. The sides of walls built with these stones typically have a high batter, and are more pyramidal than vertical in cross-section. As they have widened and lowered over time, most all-stone walls in the Shire have had been topped up with post and wire. This wall is an exception, a long wall that remains all-stone rather than a modified stone and post & wire composite fence. Parts of the wall have had a detached post-and-wire fence added behind, rather than having been inserted into the original wall. Unlike most such walls in the Shire, this wall is thus relatively undamaged.

The general context of the wall is flat volcanic grassland, near the centre of the former Clarke *Rockbank* estate. It is one of a group of dry stone walls, situated along Plumpton and Holden Roads (Wall Nos: P200-211), which are situated near former volcanic source MB5. This lava shield volcano, and possibly a less significant volcanic eruption point a little to its north,³ is the likely source of the stone of these walls. The property on which the wall is situated also has a number of dry stone walls and other structures.

The immediate context of the wall is a later cypress plantation along most of its length. This has been planted far enough behind the wall to leave it undamaged. The wall is situated on one of the major north-south roads in this part of the Shire, giving it good visual accessibility. Along a smaller section of the wall north of the cypress plantation, it is significantly obscured by unmown grass on the road verge.

'MB5', the unnamed former Lava Shield volcano to the north of the wall is of local geological significance.⁴ It is closer to the wall, and is perhaps more likely to be the source of its stone.

1 Rosengren, N, 'Eruption Points of the Newer Volcanics Province of Victoria: An Inventory and Evaluation of Scientific Significance', a report prepared for the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) and the Geological Society of Australia (Victorian Division), 1994, pp.373-4.

2 *ibid*, pp.21, 201

3 *ibid*, p.374. This eruption point (No.31) also situated on the east side of Plumpton Road, is not identified as being of significance by Rosengren.

4 Rosengren, *op cit*, p.321

In common with most old dry stone walls on Victoria's volcanic plains, the wall is in variable condition, ranging from excellent to poor condition. The wall has been considerably maintained and substantially rebuilt by its current owners, the Ford family. Although not by professional wallers, this repair has occurred with a higher degree of care and skill than is evident with most walls in the Shire.

Running perpendicular to Wall P200 on the west side of Plumpton Road are Walls P201 and P202, low composite walls ('half-walls') that almost certainly post-date Wall P200 on Plumpton Road, and could date to after the break-up of the Rockbank estate in the early twentieth century. Wall P200 is a very long wall, although somewhat short of the c.1600 metres (mile) than the original Plumpton Road boundary of Section 25.

History:

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY: DRY STONE WALLS IN NINETEENTH CENTURY VICTORIA

- **Fencing the Wilderness, 1850s-1870s**

The majority of dry stone walls in Victoria appear to have been built in the 30 year period from the 1850s to the 1880s.

In 1826 rural affairs commentator James Atkinson reported that he knew of no example of dry stone walling having been erected in the colony of New South Wales.⁵ Initially pastoralists employed shepherds to look after sheep. They guided the sheep to pasture during the day, and in the evening returned them to folds, constructed of wooden hurdles or brush fences, near their huts (or outstations). There are several dry stone walls on Melton's Kororoit Creek that are thought to have been associated with early pastoralists: an outstation associated with Yuille at Caroline Springs, and the remnants of a wall that are thought to have been associated with a shepherd's enclosure.⁶ Other fencing was used on the squatters' homesteads:- the 'home paddock' (likely for the squatters' precious horses) and the 'cultivation [or kitchen] garden'. Early fences were also required to separate stock for breeding purposes. These fences were usually of post & rail, vertical timber

slabs or other primitive paling material.⁷ (However at *Greenhills* in Toolern Vale there are some remains of a dry stone wall that would appear to be the remnants of an original homestead garden.⁸)

Two major and related events in the early 1850s radically changed this situation. Firstly, the exodus to the gold-rushes made it difficult and expensive for squatters to retain labour for shepherding. And secondly, the extensive survey, subdivision and sale of Crown land in the early 1850s provided security of tenure to pastoralists, and incentive for them to invest in major improvements, including permanent fences, on their stations. Pastoralists were also encouraged to fence their land to ensure that neighbouring farmers didn't allow their stock to stray upon the open expanses of their stations.

Nevertheless, until the 1860s, extensive fencing of properties remained the exception rather than the rule. The first boundary fences in the Barrabool Hills of Victoria were only erected in 1854, and boundary and paddock fencing 'only gathered momentum after the mid 1850s.'⁹ This was no doubt due to the extensive sale of Crown Land as freehold in the 1850s, as well as the increasing availability of capital due to the gold boom, and the increasing availability of labour including professional stone wallers as alluvial gold declined in the late 1850s.

Slowly, fences began to replace shepherds on the pastoral estates. Early maps of Melton Shire show that pastoralists built walls and fences relatively sparsely – only on property boundaries and to enclose huge paddocks (about 5-10 square kilometres in the south part of Clarke's Rockbank estate).¹⁰ In dramatic contrast the same historical maps (and the mapping survey undertaken as part of this Study) show concentrated patterns of walled paddocks established on farms in the same areas at the same time. The creation of small paddocks enabled mixed farming, by securing crops and gardens from stock, and managing stock for breeding. This Study shows that, in the south of the Shire, virtually all of these fences were dry stone walls. Dry stone walls were also used to protect the homestead from stock,

5 Kerr, JS, 'Fencing, a brief account of the development of fencing in Australia', *Australasian Society for Historical Archaeology Newsletter*, Vol. 14.No.1, March 1984, pp.9-16.

6 Melton Heritage Study Place Nos. 467 and 81.

7 Kerr, *loc cit*; Allan Willingham, 'The Dry Stone Walls in the Corangamite Region: A Brief History', in Corangamite Arts Council Inc, *If These Walls Could Talk, Report of the Corangamite Dry Stone Walls Conservation Project*, Terang, 1995, p.44

8 Melton Heritage Study, Place No.055

9 Kerr, *loc cit*

10 Shire Map Series (1892); Army Ordnance Map, 1916: 'Sunbury'

to construct stockyards, fowl houses and pigpens, and possibly, on a few of the larger farms, to provide aesthetic effect.¹¹

Given the expense of establishing a farm from nothing in a wilderness, and the experience of many small farmers as agricultural labourers before coming to Australia, it is almost certain that the walls on all but the largest farms would have been constructed by farmers themselves rather than by professional wallers. For example, general hand William Ison and his wife arrived on a Werribee farm in the mid 1850s, and found there a small wooden cottage and a young German in charge, 'who had already done some clearing of the stones which covered the land ... We set to, and cleared about 10 acres, and had it fenced in with stones by the next sowing time.'¹² The quality of wall construction would have depended on the experience of the farmers and their seasonal hands at the craft. William Robinson who settled in the Tarneit area in 1872, was a stonemason who turned his skills to fieldstone, building a house (which does not survive) of the material and numerous fences (some of which do survive along Robinsons Road).

The outbreak of the highly contagious sheep disease, 'scab', which reached epidemic proportions in the 1850s, hastened enclosure of the pastoral estates.¹³ Western District squatter Neil Black quickly enclosed his Glenormiston run, and in 1854 George Russell ordered five miles of wire: '...the importance of fencing is becoming every year more apparent.'¹⁴

Likewise, the appearance of pluro-pneumonia in Australian cattle in the early 1860s impressed cattle-men of the need to isolate their properties from travelling or straying stock.¹⁵ That 'dreadful disease' also encouraged

the erection of property fences by Melton dairy farmers (and was responsible for less use of local Commons by Melton farmers).¹⁶

By 1876 the presence of 'substantial stone walls' appears to have been hallmark of a good farm in the Melton district, the *Australasian's* 'Travelling Reporter' making sure to note these on the farms of Ralph Parkinson, George Missen and Isaac Gidney.¹⁷

However little is known of dry stone wallers who worked in the Shire at the time: Irish brothers John and George Funston worked in the Toolern Vale area from the 1850s; Patrick Connor worked on Mount Aitken in the 1860s; and Dick (the mason) Mitchell, and Arcoll (Arkell) worked in the Mount Cottrell area before 1872.¹⁸

The construction of fencing that was encouraged by sheep scab and cattle pleuro pneumonia was also fostered by legislation. At the beginning of the pastoral period in Victoria, common law held that, generally, a landowner was under no obligation to construct or maintain boundary fences, or fences adjoining a public road. However, as a result of Australia's rapidly expanding pastoral industry, trespass of stock, and the need for security, Victoria's *Fences Statute 1865* gave landowners the right to claim equal contribution towards the construction or repair of boundary fences from the owners of adjoining lands.¹⁹

• Types of Fencing in the Nineteenth Century

The great variety and combination of nineteenth century fencing arose 'as much from material shortages and the need to use what was procurable as from a desire to improve the utility and durability of fencing.'²⁰ As is the case with the rest of the Shire, most of the walls in the Greigs Road precinct are 'composite' stone and post & wire, rather than all-stone.

• Dry Stone Walls

In 1856 a government agricultural reporter travelling

11 Alan Marshall, asking an old waller why the walls on a particular property were so high, was told that ostensibly the reason was to keep steers in (they jumped fences), but the real reason was 'just so that he could say he had the best walls in the Western District, the biggest and the best, and bugger you.' (cited in Corangamite Arts Council, 1995, p.114). On Melbourne's western plains district however, such finely constructed walls were generally associated with formal gardens on only the largest properties, such as the Ha Ha walls on the Eynesbury (Melton Shire) and Werribee Park (Wyndham Shire) pastoral estates, or Greystones (Moorabool Shire).

12 Murray, E, *The Plains of Iramoo*, Henwood & Dancy, Geelong, 1974, p.111. (Murray notes that in 1974 these walls were still standing.)

13 Kerr, *loc cit*

14 Willingham, *op cit*, p.45

15 Kerr, *loc cit*

16 Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1864, p.94 ; John Chandler, Michael Canon, *Forty Years in the Wilderness* (Loch Haven, Main Ridge, 1990), p.175

17 *The Australasian*, October 1876.

18 Bilszta, JA, 'Dry Stone Wall: Faulkners Road, Mt Cottrell, Shire of Melton', 9/9/1990, unpublished paper

19 Lawlink: New South Wales Law Reform Commission website: 'Report 59 (1988) – Community Law Reform Program: Dividing Fences'; Parliament of Victoria website: Law Reform Committee, 'Review of the Fences Act 1968'

20 Kerr, *loc cit*

through the eastern part of Melton Shire (the Parish of Maribyrnong) commented that: 'A few good stone fences the only improvement worth noting.'²¹

A dry stone wall was the best solution:- 'Where stone was abundant, timber scarce, transport of fencing material expensive, skilled labour available, and where cheaper alternatives were unavailable.'²² From about the mid-late 1850s, when freehold ownership exploded and the price of labour declined, and through the early 1860s when the price of labour remained cheap, the labour-intensive construction of stone walls remained very competitive.

Stone walls were built wherever stony ground made them possible, or necessary. While most farmers built their own walls to clear stony ground and manage stock and crops, pastoralists could afford professional wallers.²³ In the mid 1850s brothers John and George Funston, stone wallers and farm labourers from Ireland, are known to have been erecting walls on the Mount Aitken and Gisborne Park estates.²⁴ The Mount Aitken station accounts in 1868 showing the employment of a John Starkie for four weeks to help Henry gather and cart stones, and the engagement of 'Paterick [sic] Connor, Stone Wall Fencer' to erect 34 chains of stone walling at the very low rate of only 8 shillings per chain.

The Fences Statute 1874 lists numerous types of fences, including 'walls' (stone walls) and 'combination' type fences. Walls that divided properties had to be a minimum of 4 feet high (1.22 metres), with a base of 'not less than 2 feet wide at the bottom', and '9 inches at the top'.²⁵ Although the specifications for road boundary fences were not given (the Crown being exempt from the legislation) it could be expected that the walls on these public boundaries would be at least as high as those that divided neighbouring properties.

Post and rail fences were the most common early fence type in Australia, no doubt due to the prevalence of forests and woodlands, in comparison with stony land, across Victoria. They appeared early and were prominent in the study area. In 1854 William Westgarth, on his way to the goldfields Royal Commission in Ballarat, recorded that he 'struck west through post and rail fences onto the Keilor Plains'.²⁶ By the 1860s timber fencing, probably from the Grey Box forest in the west and south-west of the Shire, was common in the vicinity of Melton. But as local farmer John Chandler recorded, such fencing was prone to loss in the bushfires that swept south from the ranges over the plains.²⁷ Even in the volcanic area near Aitkens Hill to the north of the Shire, nearly 80% of squatter John Aitken's fencing was either 'post & rail' (either 2 rail, the most common, or 3 rail), or 'post & 2 rails with (2 or 3) wires', or 'post & rail with 5 foot palings'. The balance was 'stone walls'.²⁸ These figures might reflect squatters' early preference for timber fencing, and an early dearth of professional dry stone walling skills, not remedied until after the gold rushes. In 1868 on the same property Henry Beattie erected much more stone walling, but also built nearly twice as much '3-rail fence' in the same year.²⁹

Post and wire fences were first introduced into Victoria in the 1850s, but the price of the metal posts (which could often not go down into the dry hard ground in Victoria) made them 'exceedingly expensive'.³⁰ The very thick and soft 'black bull wire' was soon superseded by galvanised steel wires which, with droppers to keep the wire stable, allowing greater distance between fence posts, reducing the costs.³¹ With progressive improvements, including local production of wire, use of timber posts, and winding and straining devices, by at least the early 1870s wire was the cheapest type of fence.³² The invention of barbed wire in the 1870s, and its widespread use in Victoria in the 1880s meant that it could secure cattle as well as sheep, and it became the

21 Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 'Statistics of Victoria for 1856', Appendix No.1, p.46

22 Vines, G, 'Comparative Analysis of Dry Stone Walls in Victoria, Australia and Overseas', in Corangamite Arts Council, 1995, *op cit*, p.56

23 Ann Beggs-Sunter, 'Buninyong and District Community News', Issue 211, August 1996

24 Judith Bilszta, Melton Heritage Study Research, Place No.029 (3/8/2005)

25 The Fences Statute 1874 (Fences Amendment Act, November 1873), Clause 4 (i-xi). Other types of early fencing are described in Michael Cannon's *Life in the Country: Australia in the Victorian Age: 2*, Nelson, West Melbourne, 1978, pp.89-90; and Graham Condah's *Of the Hut I Buildded*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p.89.

26 Lack, J, Ford, O, 'Melbourne's Western Region: An Introductory History' (Melbourne's Living Museum of the West Inc, Melbourne Western Region Commission, 1986), p.27

27 Chandler, *op cit*, p.174

28 Map, 'Index of Fences' on John Aitken's Mount Aitken property (after Crown Land sales). PROV 460/P0/39365. (The stone walls would appear not to survive.)

29 Beattie, Steward K, *The Odd Good Year: Early Scots to Port Phillip, Northern Australia, Gap, Gisborne and Beyond*, Southwood Press, Marrickville, 1999, p.63

30 Willingham, *op cit*, pp.45-6

31 Cannon, 1978, *op cit*, pp.89-91

32 Survey of 21 Selectors in the Holden – Mount Cottrell districts.

standard fence type from this time.³³

The popularity of stone walls with farmers is evident in the Lands Department files relating to the 1860s Selection Acts, which record the type, length and price of fencing ‘improvements’ made by each selector. A detailed examination of 21 selections in the Mount Cottrell, Rockbank, Mount Kororoit and Diggers Rest–Holden areas reveals that stone walling constituted by far the largest proportion (60%) of the 32.3 kilometres of fencing built on those properties by c.1875, despite the fact that it was the most expensive. Post & wire fences, one of the cheapest types of fencing then available, comprised only 6% of all fences erected. Post & rail fences, a little cheaper than the best stone walls, and a little dearer than the cheapest, constituted 9% of the fences. (Note that many other ‘composite’ varieties of fences were constructed from these three primary materials. There were also a small number of ‘stub’ or picket, and ‘log’ fences.³⁴)

Stone walling resolved two problems: the need to clear the land of rocks, and the need for fencing. Unquestionably, as was the case elsewhere, the key reason for the preference for dry stone walls on Melbourne’s western plains by selectors was the need to clear stony land to enable cropping and grazing (dairying).³⁵

Apart from the relatively small areas of Melton Shire that were sold under the Selection Acts, there were many other areas of dry stone walling in the Shire. It is estimated that there were 23 miles of fencing on the Moylan brothers’ Mt Kororoit property by 1876, and from the extensive walling that survives today it is evident that much of this was dry stone wall construction.³⁶ Property sale advertisements in the local paper suggest

that the properties on the Keilor Plain east of Toolern Creek were almost entirely walled.³⁷ Advertisements for stone wallers in the Bettlejorrk, Diggers Rest and Rockbank Estate areas appeared regularly until 1890. Between Toolern Vale and Diggers Rest the Beaty family built many kilometres of medium sized stone walls along boundaries, and a few larger walls inside their properties for stock. Other walls, including one of substantial composition (on the former Campbells’ Toolern Park property), are scattered lightly around Toolern Vale. The highest concentration of walls is situated in the southern plains of the Shire: the 1850s small farming communities of Mt Cottrell and Truganina, and the paddock and boundary fences of WJT Clarke’s Rockbank station.

According to Vines the dry stone walls of the Keilor–Werribee Plains ‘form a reasonably distinct regional style quite different from either the interstate examples or the Western District walls’. This regional style is characterised by: -

‘... walls constructed using the local rounded, smoothly weathered, basalt field-stone of variable size. They are generally fairly low walls, averaging 1.2 metres with a width at the base of an average of 0.83 metres and battered sides on a slope of about 5-10 degrees off the vertical. Coursing is uncommon although coping is almost always found on intact walls and through stones can usually be identified at regular intervals of about one metre. The coping stones are often quite large, rounded boulders of a maximum dimension of 400-500 millimetres. Because of their rounded shape the stones are rarely suited to the close-fitting construction seen on the Western district walls, either for the main part of the wall or the coping. As a result, the rabbit proofing techniques involving close plugging, overhanging coping, or other methods are never found in this region.’³⁸

These regular round stones lack interlocking, and often surface friction, and were never the ideal building material. The author of the 1848 ‘Rural Cyclopaedia’ considered round stones objectionable ‘as they are ever rolling off’. The small wedge stones which held these round stones in position were easily dislodged.³⁹ Similarly, the ‘round stone fence’ surmounted by turf was described in Loudon’s 1857 guide to British agriculture

33 Willingham, *op cit*, p.46; Kerr, *loc cit*; Cannon, 1978, *loc cit*

34 Research of PROV VPRS 625 (Selection Act files) for the Keneally, Slattery, Reddan J, Reddan M, Tate, Rhodes C, Rhodes, McKenzie, O’Brien P, McLeod, O’Brien J, Moloney, White, Mangovin, Carrige, Moylan Mary, Moylan Margaret, Parry, Moylan, MP, Moylan T, and Watts selections. This sample is primarily of selectors on stony country, Hannah Watts, in the forest off Chapmans Road Toolern Vale being the only exception; interestingly, the cost of her post & rail fences were half the price of the others, no doubt reflecting the relative proximity of materials, with none of the other properties having ready access to local timber. Another possible bias of the sample is the over-representation of Moylan properties. But it remains a good sample of fences built in stony country in the period late 1860s to mid 1870s.

35 Selectors were in fact obliged under the Selection Acts to cultivate 10% of their land area.

36 The *Australasian*, 28th October 1876

37 Bilszta, 1990, *op cit*.

38 Corangamite Arts Council, *op cit*, p.58

39 Willingham, *op cit*, p.41

as a 'very indifferent fence', whose only apparent benefit was that it cleared the land of stone and could be built by labourers. It was found to be unstable when built to a standard wall height. Stock could easily dislodge its copings, and 'great trouble and expense are annually required to keep it in repair.'⁴⁰ Despite this, as can be seen in an apparently scarce example of this type in Corangamite (the Foxhow Road Wall), a sturdy wall of very respectable height could be built by careful selection and coursing of stones, and the use of copestones and extensive plugging.⁴¹

The Fences Statute's specification of walls to be a minimum 4 feet (1220 mm) high seems to have been the 'average paddock height' for which tenders were called in sheep country.⁴² Walls in cattle country were built higher 'to discourage the cattle from leaning over to reach greener pastures and dislodging coping stones'. While numerous Western District dairying walls are higher, 'walls enclosing cattle were generally at least 1.4 metres (4 feet 7 inches) high.'⁴³ This standard also seems to have been applied in Melton, where the Moylan's high walls on Mount Kororoit Farm measure 1400 mm.

Although there is no conclusive evidence of it in Melton Shire, elsewhere boundary walls were built higher than internal walls. Vines states that: 'In almost all the dry stone wall regions in Victoria, the ... most substantial walls are located along the boundaries of properties. Subdivision of properties into fields was evidently a secondary consideration once the property had been fenced. Additional stone walls would be constructed to subdivide the property into paddocks if the field stone was so abundant as to allow these.'⁴⁴ Perkins (whose stone wall education was in Britain) states similarly that: 'Inner boundaries however were not built as high as the boundary fences, which are also known as March Dykes.'⁴⁵

While most of the walls in the Shire of Melton and on

Melbourne's western plains were 'composite walls', either built with a stone bottom and post-and-wire top, or had a post-and-wire top added as the original all-stone wall collapsed over time, Wall No.P200 on Plumpton Road is now unusual as a remaining all-stone wall in the Shire of Melton.

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY: THE CLARKE ROCKBANK ESTATE

On 24 August 1850 WJT ('Big') Clarke threw the administration of Port Phillip into turmoil by applying to purchase 20,000 acres of Sunbury land under a previously unused provision of an 1842 Imperial Land Act. Despite the strongest protests by existing squatters (including *Rockbank* pastoralist WC Yuille) he succeeded in purchasing 31,317 acres of this prime land. Clarke's consequent entitlement to lease three times that area of lands that adjoined this freehold (his 'grass-right') 'spelt disaster' for the existing pastoralists.⁴⁶

Clarke's grass-right entitlement didn't last long as during the 1850s most of the leased land was put up for auction by the Crown. However most former pastoralists could not afford to purchase sizeable holdings, and their reduced holdings (often just a 640 acre pre-emptive right) were too small to graze profitably. Former Melton squatters such as Yuille, Pinkerton and Pyke were squeezed out, some ruined. Those pastoralists who had accumulated capital - Clarke, the Chirnsides, and Staughton - soon dominated the whole Port Phillip district.⁴⁷ In Melton other substantial pastoral properties were the *Green Hills* station at Toolern Vale, and William Taylor's 10,000 acre Keilor estate *Overnewton* (which included much of the area between Mt Kororoit and Sydenham).

During the 1850s Big Clarke bought thousands of acres of cheap Crown land to extend his Sunbury Special Survey south-westwards towards Melton, Derrimut, and the Werribee River.⁴⁸ He purchased vast tracts of plains land (around Mt Cotterell, Rockbank, and Truganina), and also much smaller and more strategically located pockets along Kororoit Creek.

40 Loudon, JC, *Encyclopaedia of Agriculture*, 5th Edition (Longman Brown Green Longmans and Roberts, London, 1857), p.496

41 Corangamite Arts Council, *op cit*, p.28

42 Willingham, *op cit*, p.41. (The 1300 mm height was chosen as one of the categories for Study field survey. Almost all of the walls in the Shire had a base width of 700-800 mm.); Corangamite Arts Council, *op cit*, pp.49, 113

43 *ibid*, pp.17, 21, 130; Rod McLellan, 'The Dry Stone Walls of Victoria's Western District', *Historic Environment* Vol 7 No 2, 1989, pp.28-32

44 Corangamite Arts Council, *op cit*, p.60

45 *ibid*, p.130

46 Clarke, Michael, *'Big' Clarke* (Queensberry Hill, Carlton, 1980), pp.103-5; Batey, Isaac, RHSV manuscript (1910), p.4.

47 Peel, Lynette, *Rural Industry in the Port Phillip Region 1835 - 1880* (MUP, Melbourne, 1974), pp.56, 129-131, 133.

48 Clarke, Michael, *Clarke of Rupertswood, 1831-1897: The Life and Times of William John Turner Clarke, First Baronet of Rupertswood* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 1995), p.31

One of these sites, Section 25, Parish of Kororoit, on which the Wall is situated, of 624 acres, was purchased by Clarke on 9th June 1853.⁴⁹ This was in the heart of Clarke's *Rockbank* estate: he had also purchased square-mile sections at the 1850s Crown sales immediately to the north, south, east and west of Section 25.

Over the next 20 years Clarke vigorously bought up small farms whose owners had fallen on hard times.⁵⁰ Melton local Alexander Cameron explained that there was 'a very dry season with no feed or water and small farmers were forced to sell out, their properties being added to the *Rockbank* estate.'⁵¹ For example, while Clarke had easily obtained many thousand acres of stony dry land at Crown sales, he initially had been much less successful in buying the rich land adjoining the Kororoit Creek. Yet by 1892 he owned almost all of it. The few exceptions were mostly in the hands of other pastoral estates (Overnewton and Mt Aitken), or owned by small pastoralists, the Moylan and Beaty families.⁵²

Clarke divided his vast estate into different stations including *Bollinda Vale*, *Red Rock* (both north of Sunbury, and including *Rupertswood*) and *Rockbank* (which extended south of Sunbury to near Werribee, mostly from Diggers Rest to Tarneit). The *Rockbank* station had originally been established in the early 1840s; the headstation of its previous owner, WC Yuille, had been at the Beatty's Road crossing of Kororoit Creek, the location of the former *Rockbank* Inn.

Upon Big Clarke's death in 1874 his son WJ Clarke (later to become Australia's first baronet) inherited his Victorian estate, including 136,310 acres in the Melbourne vicinity, stretching in an arc from about Sunshine, Tarneit, Balliang, *Rockbank*, Diggers Rest, Sunbury, *Bolinda Vale* and across to the Hume Highway.⁵³

• The Development of *Rockbank* Station

Once freehold tenure to their runs had been obtained, pastoralists' major investment was in land and improvements, rather than livestock as originally. Building fences and securing water points were the two first priorities, together with sheds, sheep-washing

facilities and, more slowly, when finances allowed, building comfortable homesteads.⁵⁴

With the appointment of William Francis Watson as manager, by the early 1860s work had begun on fencing, and drainage channels on the swampy ground around the *Rockbank* headstation. In 1864 disaster struck *Rockbank* when a fire destroyed many of the improvements. WJ Clarke, who was managing the estate for his father at this stage, was forced to build a new managers residence, new workmen's cottages, and a new 22-stand shearing shed.⁵⁵ The bluestone shearing shed, built 1864, with additions in 1884, by architects Reed and Barnes, is today one of the oldest woolsheds in Victoria, and included in the Victorian Heritage Register as *Deanside*.

Apart from managers and workers cottages, there was no homestead built on *Rockbank* at this time. WJ Clarke lived at Sunbury, but although Big Clarke lived in the city, he spent a lot of time at *Rockbank*. Once a fortnight he drove the few miles out there with his stock agent's two leading salesmen, William Hudson and John Murray Peck. 'At *Rockbank*, Clarke was accustomed to make a personal selection of the fat sheep that were to be walked to Newmarket.'⁵⁶

JM Peck's young son Harry, later to become a legendary Newmarket stock agent, used to ride out with the men. His memoirs carry high praise for the Clarke stock, bred under the 'genius' of the Clarke's overall manager Robert Clarke (no relation). They also suggest the significance of the *Rockbank* station: -

*'For many years the wethers and cast-for-age-ewes of English Leicester-Merino crosses from the Clarke stations travelled in on the hoof in mobs of 500-1000, week after week, right through the winters, and topped Newmarket for quality and price. Never since have we seen the like in such numbers for evenness of type and quality combined. Subdivision of the Clarke properties resulting in the dispersal of these flocks was a distinct loss to the pastoral community.'*⁵⁷

As was evident by Big Clarke's personal control of *Rockbank*, the station was a core part of the Clarke operations, providing fattening for the stock, which

49 Parish Plan, Parish of Kororoit.

50 Peel, *op cit*

51 Cameron, Alexander, 'Melton Memoirs' (MDHS), p.16. (This would have been in the dry seasons of 1861-65, which concluded with a destructive flood in 1865.)

52 SLV Houghton, Plan I 29 (15/5/1854); Parish Plan: Kororoit; 'Shire Map Series' plans, SLV, 821.1A (1892)

53 Peel, *op.cit.*, pp.130-1; Clarke (1980), *op cit*, opposite p.247

54 Peel, *op cit*, p.62

55 Clarke, 1995, *op cit*, p.36

56 Clarke, 1980, *op cit*, p.241

57 Peck, HH *Memoirs of a Stockman*, fourth edition (Stock & Land Publishing Co, Melbourne, 1972), p.97

could then be sent to Newmarket in good condition. Melton's Alexander Cameron also elaborated on Rockbank's two-fold advantages of in his memoirs. Firstly, 'the grass on the Keilor plains was sweet, and the property specialised in fattening wethers and barren ewes for the Newmarket sales.' Secondly, Rockbank, 'being so close to Melbourne market' allowed the drovers to 'start with the sheep in the evening and be at the market in the morning.'⁵⁸

In the mid-1870s, when WJ Clarke (later Sir WJ Clarke) was the President of Melton Shire, he was pulling down huts and rebuilding bluestone cottages for the shepherds on *Rockbank* station.⁵⁹

Big Clarke died in 1874 and WJ Clarke inherited his Victorian pastoral estates. Whereas Big Clarke was notorious for his parsimony, WJ Clarke was progressive and prepared to invest. It would be consistent with WJ Clarke's general approach to property if a substantial stone walling program commenced in his era.

Before leaving on his 1874-75 Grand Tour of Europe, Clarke took great pains to organise the running of his huge estates during his absence. 'Each manager and agent was given a program to follow and told to submit monthly reports to him by mail.' He sent them specific instructions regarding sheep, cattle, improved grasses and the preservation of the hares.⁶⁰

A report on the property by the *Australasian's* 'Travelling Reporter' in 1876 advised that *Rockbank* sheep station was 40,000 acres in extent, and carried some 33,000 to 36,000 sheep (depending on the season), and some 800 head of cattle. The land was 'all open plains, with scarcely any shelter for the stock.'⁶¹

In 1879 the local paper advertised that 'Stonewallers wanted on Rockbank Station. Apply the Manager.' Again in 1880 the paper carried an advertisement:- 'Wanted. Stonewallers on Rockbank Station. Apply The Raglan Hotel or Monmouthshire Hotel.'⁶² These advertisements add to the evidence of a period of considerable walling on the property, although such a program may also have included the large dry stone wall dams that Clarke constructed, including the two on the gully west of

Plumpton Road: the Holden Road Dam, on the property, and the Plumpton Dam to the north.

• **Greyhound Coursing**

The wall, situated on 'Plumpton Road' and close to Australia's first coursing Plumpton, may have featured in WJT Clarke's pioneering greyhound coursing events at Diggers Rest.

Together with fox hunting and shooting, coursing was one of the traditional recreations of a country gentleman. Originally there were no tracks or enclosures and each race consisted of two greyhounds pursuing a hare across country. The first officially recognised public coursing meeting held in Australia, in which hares were the game coursed, was held in 1873 on WJ Clarke's Rupertswood station at Sunbury. On the 14th of August 1874, this property hosted the inaugural 'Waterloo Cup', which became the premier greyhound trophy in Australia.

On 14th May 1874 the inaugural 'St Leger Stakes', another celebrated greyhound trophy, was organised by Clarke on his Rockbank station in Melton Shire, at Wallace's Paddock Diggers Rest. Diggers Rest had the advantages over Clarke's Sunbury paddocks of finer grass and more level terrain, so that the courses were easier to follow:

*'...The ground was dry and firm, good going for the 400 spectators, who were quiet and orderly. The courses were easier to predict because the hares tended to run north, striving to escape into the rough ground bordering Jacksons Creek.'*⁶³

Another advantage of Diggers Rest was the nearby railway station, which made public access to the paddocks easy: 'The special train was waiting nearby and reached Melbourne before six o'clock.'

63 Clarke (1995), *op cit*, pp. 74-75

58 Cameron, *op cit*, p.16; p.241

59 Clarke 1980, *op cit*, p.56; *The Melton Express*, 21/10/1876; *The Melton Express*, 14/11/1876

60 Clarke, 1995, *op cit*, p.85

61 *Australasian Travelling Reporter*, 28/10/1876

62 *The Melton Express*, 10/5/1879; 6/3/1880.

'Opening Meeting of the Victoria Coursing Club, at Diggers Rest.'

A good drystone wall in the open landscape is prominent in these sketches. They are entitled: 'Departure from Railway Station'; 'The Meet at Diggers Rest'; 'The Stonewall'; 'The Deciding Course'.

(The Australasian Sketcher, 14th May 1875)



Such free-range coursing was soon made obsolete by another innovation when Diggers Rest became the premier venue of the Victorian Coursing Club (of which Clarke was President). For the first time, on 1st August 1881 the VCC held the Waterloo Cup in a Plumpton enclosure:⁶⁴

'The Waterloo Cup meeting of 1st August 1882 introduced an entirely new element into field coursing. The VCC decided to construct a Plumpton enclosure. The word Plumpton came from a village in Sussex, and WJ Clarke sent details back to Australia after his visit there. The enclosed new oval was hurriedly constructed a mile west of Diggers Rest and was first used for the final two days of the Waterloo Cup. It drew a very large crowd to view the most successful meeting yet held.

64 *ibid*, p.157

*The innovation met with almost universal approval ... there was much less fatigue than that caused by tramping over hundreds of boulder-strewn acres to follow 20 courses in a day ... The meeting ended with hearty cheers for the absent Hon. WJ Clarke...'*⁶⁵

For the 1883 season Clarke erected stands, a ladies' enclosure and other improvements.⁶⁶ It was said that: 'none of the most renowned coursing grounds in England equalled the new set-up at Diggers Rest.'⁶⁷ The construction of an enclosed course would have meant that walls such as the wall no longer figured in the VCC's famous coursing events at Diggers Rest. By the early 1890s the introduction of greyhound racing in turn caused the demise of the Plumpton. In 1894 the VCC closed 'the Oval'. The special fencing and other improvements were sold and Clarke's 20 year reign as the coursing king of Victoria came to an end. However greyhound racing, always greatly popular in Melton Shire, continued. In May 1876 the Melton Coursing Club was formed at a Raglan Hotel meeting. Over the decades it held its coursing events on Staughton's *Exford*, Browne's *Green Hills*, Moylan's *Mt Kororoit*, Farrell's *Melton Park* and other local properties.⁶⁸

• **The Twentieth Century Break-up of Rockbank Station.**

By the end of the nineteenth century historical changes were afoot. In Melton there had long been a belief that the Clarke and other large sheep-runs in the area were holding back the development of the town. In the 1860s local Melton farmer Anders Hjorth had observed that 'the village was surrounded by large pastoral estates on three sides.'⁶⁹ As early as 1883 the situation enraged Victoria's radical liberal politician John Quick:

*'What a monstrous and barbaric law that must be, under which the splendid land between Melbourne and Sunbury, and between Melbourne and Geelong, capable of giving homes and existence to a teeming population, is locked up in pastoral solitudes.'*⁷⁰

65 *ibid*, p.110

66 *ibid*, p.110. (Superior to the Chirnsides' *Werribee Park* copy)

67 *ibid*, p.292

68 Pollitt, *op cit*, p.54; Cameron, *op cit*, p.20; Macdonald, *op cit*, p.10; Starr, *op cit*, pp.199-202; Collins, *op cit*; Peck, Harry H, *Memoirs of a Stockman* (Stock and Land Publishing Co, Melbourne, 1972), pp.50-51; D & W Beaty, pers. conv.; Charles Watson, personal conversation, 9/12/2005; G Minns, pers. conv.

69 Hjorth, *op cit*. Also, MDHS (1905 Melton Express), *op cit*, which refers to these three stations, plus Taylor's *Overnewton Estate*.

70 Cited in Lack, Ford, *op cit*, p.32

Popular discontent intensified as the the 1890s depression deepened, with calls for the repurchase of good pastoral lands for subdivision into small farms. The language was as it had always been: ‘the plough’ versus ‘the sheepwalks’. The ‘yeoman ideal’, and the associated wrestle for the land between the rich and the poor had been a long-running and major theme in Australian history, evident in the diggers’ movements to ‘unlock the land’ in the 1850s and 60s, the ‘Closer Settlement’ Acts at the turn of the century, and the early-mid twentieth century ‘Soldier Settlement’ Acts.

Towards the turn of the century political pressure increased on the owners of Melton’s pastoralists to ‘break-up’ their huge estates. Some of the Melton pastoralists – Sir RTH Clarke of *Rupertswood* and Samuel Staughton of *Eynesbury* – were also local parliamentary representatives in this period, and happy to maintain their family reputations as benevolent local squires. In 1897 Sir Rupert Turner Havelock Clarke Bart, the new inheritor of the Clarke empire, had mused in Parliament about cutting up 40,000 acres of his 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.’⁷¹ 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.⁷²

And so the beginning of the twentieth century marked a major new era in the history of Melton. It saw the subdivision and sale of thousands of acres of the Clarke, Taylor, and Staughton pastoral empires, and after the First World War, of smaller pastoral estates such as *Melton Park* and *Green Hills*. In 1905 the Closer Settlement Board purchased *Overnewton* and subdivided it into smaller farming allotments.

This early twentieth century ‘break-up’ of the large estates was a milestone in Australia’s history. It 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. In 1901 there were 42,000 rural properties in Victoria. By 1914 this number had jumped to 70,500, and by 1923 to a peak of 80,500.⁷³

In 1898 surveyors on behalf of Sir RTH Clarke began recording the bearings and lengths and fences of the estate in preparation for its sale.⁷⁴ The first land sales of the *Rockbank* property, near Werribee, were held in 1901. On Saturday 17th November 1906 the southern part of the *Rockbank* estate, comprising 21,306 acres (over 33 square miles, or c.85 square kilometres) was put up for auction by agent WS Keast & Co on the property at Deer Park.⁷⁵ In this driest part of *Rockbank* the ‘farming’ allotments were sold in much larger parcels, and the rural properties that consequently established there were typically sheep grazing properties, much larger than those elsewhere. In 1909 it was reported that Clarke had sold all that part of the vast *Rockbank* Estate around Digger’s Rest.⁷⁶ In the same period Clarke also subdivided and sold most of the *Rupertswood*, *Red Rock* and *Bolinda Vale* estates that had been so carefully acquired and tended by his grandfather and father.⁷⁷

• Dry Stone Walling on the *Rockbank* Estate

Research undertaken in this project indicates that the Clarkes (WJT Clarke, Sir WJ Clarke, and Sir RTH Clarke) built nearly half of the drystone walls that remain in the Shire. Of a total of over 165 kilometres of drystone walls in Melton Shire (identified in the Shire of Melton Dry Stone Walls study), some 74 km, or 45%, appear to have been built as part of the Clarkes’ vast *Rockbank* Estate. Most of the surviving Clarke walls, and the most

73 Dingle, *op cit*, p 193.

74 Clarke (1980), *passim*; Lands Victoria Torrens Application 32123. Sir RTH Clarke Bart. sold the vast section of the *Rockbank* Estate that lay south of the Western Highway in November 1906; it appears that he sold the northern portion about a year earlier. (PROV VPRS 460/PO, 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.)

75 PROV VPRS 460/PO (35850)

76 *The Sunbury News*, 24 July 1909, p.2.

77 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/PO (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.

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

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

prominent of these, are situated in the southern part of the estate, south of Greigs Road.

Unlike farming properties, the vast majority of *Rockbank* pastoral estate walls erected were boundary walls. There were relatively few internal paddock walls. It could be conjectured that *Rockbank* estate boundary walls were more substantial due to their purpose in providing security. However a more detailed study would be required to confirm this. Indeed most of the boundary walls are of much less quality than this wall, although this was probably not always the case. The style and quality of dry stone walls on the Clarke estate varies considerably. This would relate at least in part to the range of wallers used over the long period of their construction, and to the availability and quality of stone on different parts of the estate.

History of the Place

The wall is situated on the west side of Plumpton Road south of Holden Road. It constitutes a boundary to the east side of Section 25, Parish of Kororoit. This allotment is a square, with boundaries of 7900 links (1.59 kilometres), virtually one mile. It is still near this length.

Section 25 was alienated by the Crown to WJ Clarke in June 1854. It was part of the district 'Subdivided by Assistant Surveyor Gibbins April 1854 and sold at Melbourne on the 8th day of June 1854'.⁷⁸ The square mile sections to the east, west, north and south of Section 25, and many others beyond, were also purchased from the Crown by Clarke in the 1850s. The country was described by the early surveyors as 'good grazing country, no timber very stony in places'.⁷⁹

In 1854 a track from Keilor to *Green Hills* Station crossed Plumpton Road about 400 metres south of Holden Road, above the headwaters of two shallow gullies, in the exact location of the later wall.⁸⁰ It is clear that the country was unfenced at this time, and the wall was not in existence in 1854.

However Clarke soon began to enclose his land. Another early (1857) map of the area immediately adjacent to (but not including) that part of Plumpton Road upon

which the wall is built, shows a north-south 'Stone Fence' one mile east of Plumpton Road, in between two Clarke square mile sections.⁸¹ The existence of a 'fence' and 'stone fence' so close suggests that it is possible that the wall was also built around this time.⁸² However, that part of Plumpton Road north of wall is shown on this map, and there are no stone walls marked on it. This is mysterious, as it would seem more logical for Clarke to have constructed a wall one mile further west, along the line of a public road which would have necessitated security, than along the internal boundary of two properties both of which were in his ownership. It may simply have been that the government surveyor was focussing on the eastern part of the mapped area, near the Mt Alexander Road and the railway line that were then under construction, and so did not mark all the fences and walls further to the west. Or perhaps Clarke was taking advantage of the fence that would have been built as part of the new railway to the north-east to form an enclosed paddock of appropriate proportions. It is also possible that in the 1850s Plumpton Road was one of the many 'Closed Roads' – surveyed road reservations across which fences or walls were being built by large landowners to prevent through access by the public – that were situated on the *Rockbank* estate (these roads appear to have remained enclosed until at least the late 1870s.)⁸³

The wall is situated on the Keilor Plains, which appears to have been the heart of *Rockbank*. Here was the 'sweet' grass upon which the fine Leicester-Merino crosses were fattened before 'Big' Clarke selected those to go to Newmarket. It was in this immediate vicinity that the Clarkes later constructed two large dry stone wall dams on the gully west of Plumpton Road.

Big Clarke died in 1874 and WJ Clarke inherited his Victorian pastoral estates. Whereas Big Clarke was notorious for his parsimony, WJ Clarke was progressive and prepared to invest. In the mid-1870s he was pulling down huts and rebuilding bluestone shepherds cottages on *Rockbank* homestation on the Kororoit Creek.⁸⁴ In 1879 the local paper advertised that '*Stonewallers wanted on Rockbank Station. Apply the Manager.*' Again in 1880 the paper carried an advertisement:- '*Wanted.*

81 Lands Victoria, P/A Map H99 (5th May 1857)

82

83 See citations for the Mt Cottrell Dry Stone Wall Precinct and the Mt Atkinson Dry Stone Wall Precinct.

84 Clarke (1980), *op cit*, p.56; The *Melton Express*, 21/10/1876; The *Melton Express*, 14/11/1876

78 P/A K74(B2), 1852.

79 Lands Victoria, P/A H98 (B2), 1868.

80 Lands Victoria, 'Kororoit: County of Bourke: Roads Existing in 1839'

*Stonewallers on Rockbank Station. Apply The Raglan Hotel or Monmouthshire Hotel.*⁸⁵ These advertisements add to the evidence of a period of considerable walling on *Rockbank* in the late 1870s, although such a program may also have included the large dry stone wall dams that Clarke constructed.

It is more likely than not that the wall dates from around the time that Plumpton Road was actually opened to the public. This may have been anytime from the mid 1850s until after the 1878 Royal Commission into Closed Roads recommended that pastoralists re-open the public roads on their properties. Plumpton Road was obviously named after the VCC Plumpton that was located north-west of wall, on the north side of Holden Road, c.0.5 kilometre west of intersection with Plumpton Road.⁸⁶ While it came to fame as the road along which punters accessed the Plumpton from Diggers Rest station, it may well have been a little used, but open, road well before 1882 when the Plumpton was opened.

In 1899 Sir RTH Clarke commissioned Claude Purchas to survey the northern part of the Rockbank Station, in the parishes of Kororoit, Yangardook, Holden and Maribyrnong, a total of 14,202 acres (c.5750 hectares).⁸⁷ The area included Section 25 Parish of Kororoit. There were far fewer dry stone walls in this part of Rockbank than the part south of the Western Highway. Purchas' survey plans show that in this area 'fences' and 'post and rail fences' greatly outnumbered the number of boundaries marked with 'stone walls' or 'wall and fence'.

The present wall was in the heart of the major precinct of stone walls in this northern part of the *Rockbank* Station. It was the middle part of the 'stone walls' that extended along a three mile section on the west side of Plumpton Road. (It is less clear whether there were dry stone walls on the east side of Plumpton Road in this period.) There were more limited lengths of other stone walls nearby, notably on north side of Holden Road (west of Plumpton Road), south along the Keilor Melton Road (Melton Highway), and to a lesser extent, on the east side of Holden Road.

The wall defines the eastern boundary of the paddock

85 The *Bacchus Marsh Express*, 10/5/1879; 6/3/1880.

86 Historic Plan: M/Def 94 (1908)

87 PROV VPRS 460/P/32123, Torrens Application lodged by Clarke on 16th October 1899. This area extended from Beattys Road in the south across the Melton Highway, Holden Road, Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road, and to Davis Road in the north, encompassing much of the land eastwards from the Kororoit Creek towards Jacksons Creek.

on which was situated the Holden Dam, some 1400 metres to its west.

In 1900 *Rockbank* Station overseer Henry Randall made a statutory declaration that the fences and walls shown on the plans had all been erected and continuously maintained 'during the last 15 years and upwards'. Elsewhere he states that walls and fences had been erected for '15 consecutive years last past at the least'.⁸⁸ This suggests that Randall had commenced work on the property in the year 1885, and that the walls and fences now shown were in existence at that time. The wall was thus built sometime between 1854 and 1885. This was the major period of construction for dry stone walls in Victoria.

Clarke subdivided and sold the estate at the turn of the century.⁸⁹ It is likely that Section No.25 was purchased by a farmer who (together with his/her successors) maintained the existing wall, whereas at some stage the stone walls on either side of it (on Plumpton Road) were removed by different owners. As such the remaining portion of stone wall has been reduced to approximately the original mile length of Section 25.

A 1916 Army Ordnance map shows that there was no dwelling situated on Section 25 in that year; the next map in this series (1938) does show a dwelling,⁹⁰ so it is possible that initially the property was part of a much larger farm, and the wall was isolated when Section 25 became a discrete property. The 1938 map shows a driveway extending into the north part of the property off Plumpton Road, in the vicinity of the two lower stone walls (P202, P204), which were probably built in the early part of the twentieth century.

By the mid-late twentieth century the dam on the property was known locally as 'Fowls Dam'.⁹¹ The property may have been owned by people of that name. The property has been held by the Ford family for some years, and is now known as *Colglenn*. The wall

88 *ibid*, Statutory Declaration, Henry Randall 'of Rockbank ... Station Overseer', 14th July 1900.

89 'Rural Heritage Study, Western Region of Melbourne' (Chris Johnston, Context, 1994, pp.171,173) suggests that Section 25 was probably taken up by a First World War Soldier Settler. However it is unlikely that this part of the former Clarke *Rockbank* estate was resumed by the Crown for subdivision under either the Closer or Soldier Settlement schemes, as this is not indicated on the the Parish Plan, as would be the case.

90 Army Ordnance Maps: 'Sunbury' (1916) (1938)

91 John Beaty, personal conversation, 8/5/2002

has been known by them as the 'mile wall'.⁹²

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Shire of Melton Historical Themes: 'Pastoral', 'Farming', 'Transport', 'Water'.

Comparable Places in Shire of Melton:

The most comparable walls in the Shire of Melton are boundary walls of the former Clarke Rockbank station. Most of these are in poor condition, and were originally or have since been converted to composite wall and post-and-wire fence walls. The most comparable wall is the Faulkers Road wall (F100), which is shorter, but higher and would appear to be in more original condition.

Condition:

Overall the wall is in good condition.

Integrity:

The wall has been extensively repaired, and its overall integrity is fair.

Recommendations:

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.

Other Recommendations:

- The impact on the structure of the cypress plantation that has been planted close behind the wall needs to be monitored.
- Visibility of the walls is diminished where grass has been allowed to grow in front of the wall along Plumpton Road. It is recommended that grass be kept mown.
- A campaign of education regarding the significance of the walls, and penalties for theft of stone, should

92 Glenn W Ford, personal conversation, 14/3/2002

be initiated by the Shire of Melton. This might include interpretation and other signage.

The integrity of the wall is likely to be affected by any future change in land-use (including rural residential development) or road widening proposals. If this is envisaged, guidelines for appropriate development of the walls (new gates etc) should be prepared; compliance with these should be mandatory.

Walls P200.

A section of the wall in excellent condition; well repaired.



Walls P200.

The average condition of the wall. Note the round, relatively smooth and large field-stone with which the wall is constructed.



Walls P200.

A poor section of the wall.



Walls P200.

Section of the wall north of the cypress plantation. The use of split fieldstone is more prominent in this portion of the wall. The construction of a separate fence to augment the wall has preserved its integrity. In contrast to the main portion of the wall further south, the long grass on the road verge obstructs the view of this portion of the wall.

