Citation No. 7 - Selection Wall, Western Highway

Melton Dry Stone Walls Survey Nos: Wall No N224. (The Gidney Wall)

Location: 2344-2412 Western Highway Rockbank; 1031-1085 Beattys Road Rockbank; 986-1008, 1010-1024, 1026-1040, 1042-1060 Leakes Road, Rockbank. Crown Allotments 2, 3, 5, Section 7, Parish of Kororoit

Critical Dates: Original construction 1867-68; progressive (non skilled) repair and reconstruction

Existing Heritage Listings: None

Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL

Statement of Significance:

The dry stone wall between the Western Highway and Beattys Road, Rockbank, is significant at the LOCAL level. Built c.1867-68, it is now an early and rare vestige of the opening up of the Rockbank commons for Selection in 1867. It is one of the longest walls in the Shire. It is the only example of the significant heritage of dry stone walls of the Shire of Melton that is visible to city-bound traffic on one of Victoria's major highways.

The dry stone wall, also known as the Selection Wall between the Western Highway and Beattys Road, Rockbank, is historically significant at the LOCAL level. (AHC A4, B2, D2) The wall is expressive of early farming practices on Melbourne's western plains. The wall is an early, rare, and one of the most substantial surviving structures of any sort associated with the Rockbank selections in the the 1860s and 70s; the only building known to survive from this selection period is the (much altered) former Rose & Crown Hotel,(HO 121) built 1875; other extant dry stone walls from the Rockbank selection

era are very much remnants of the originals. The wall comprises the most substantial surviving evidence of Isaac Gidney's Spring Farm, and his trade of horses and chaff for the India army, an enterprise engaged in by some large farmers in the Melton – Werribee districts. The wall is also associated with Digby Tarleton, a local farmer and Newmarket stock dealer, whose family still lives in Melton, and who married the daughter of celebrated Melton midwife Hannah Watts.

The dry stone wall between the Western Highway and Beattys Road, Rockbank is aesthetically significant at the LOCAL level. (AHC E1). It is one of the longest walls in the Shire, and one of only 13% of all walls that were recorded as being over 1300 millimetres in height. Its construction is representative of a typical style of wall in Melton Shire and Melbourne's west.   It is one of the most prominent walls in the Shire by virtue of its location on the Western Highway. It is perpendicular to the highway, and is the only dry stone wall in the Shire of Melton that is in any way conspicuous to city-bound travellers on the Western Highway. Its visibility is greatly enhanced by its rural context of flat farmland and the virtual absence of buildings in its immediate vicinity.

The dry stone wall between the Western Highway and Beattys Road, Rockbank is scientifically significant at the LOCAL level. (A1, C2) It demonstrates the volcanic origin of the landscape. Its stone is generally smooth, round and dense with little surface friction, typical of Melton's dry stone walls. The wall has the potential to yield research information regarding wall construction techniques, nineteenth century rural settlement patterns, the impact of the Selection Acts, and ways of life on Melbourne's western plains.

The dry stone wall between the Western Highway and Beattys Road, Rockbank 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. As the only dry stone wall in the Shire of Melton that is effectively visible to city-bound traffic it has considerable potential for restoration and public education / interpretation regarding the important dry stone wall heritage of the Shire of Melton.

Overall, the dry stone wall between the Western Highway and Beattys Road, Rockbank is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

The wall is situated about half way between Mount Cottrell to its south, and Mount Kororoit to its north. 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.

The wall is situated south of the Kororoit Creek, so Mount Cottrell is the most likely source of the fieldstone used in its construction. Mount Cottrell was built up by a succession of lava flows over its life. These broad, thin tongue flows of lava radiated from Mt Cottrell in all directions, the longest being to the south. The lava flows changed the drainage lines and caused the present courses of the Werribee River to its west, and the Kororoit Creek to its north.[1]

Although a very broad 'shield' volcano, like many of the volcanoes on these plains, which stretch from the Darebin Creek to near the South Australian border, Mount Cottrell lends a dramatic and distinctive character to an otherwise flat landscape. Geologically Mount Cottrell is of State significance, having been identified as the 'best example in Victoria of lava shield with lava cone forming summit.' Its notable features are the unusual structures at its bluff and crater, and the extent of its radial flows. It is the 'most massive of the Werribee Plains volcanoes, and one of the largest shield volcanoes in Victoria'.[2]

The broad thin tongues of lava from Mt Cottrell were effusive and slowly cooling, producing a more dense basalt, in contrast to explosive eruptions, or quickly cooling flows, which produced a more vesicular scoria or tuff. While the vesicularity of the basalt extruded from Mount Cottrell varies, the dominant surface stone is a grey basalt,[3] which is evident in the round dense stones of the district.

This round-shaped heavy fieldstone is the dominant material used in the wall. Even the fieldstone with a vesicular surface (providing better friction for construction) is heavy and dense. 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.

After widening and lowering over time, this wall, like most original all-stone walls in the Shire, has been topped up with post and wire. Parts of the wall have had a detached post-and-wire fence added to the side of the original, rather than having been inserted into the wall. Therefore, unlike most such walls in the Shire, this wall is relatively undamaged. In addition the southern part of the wall (near the Western Highway) is an exception; it remains an all-stone rather than a modified stone and post & wire composite fence.

In common with most old dry stone walls on Victoria's volcanic plains, the wall has been non-professionally and crudely repaired over the decades. Its history of single ownership for most of its life is probably responsible for its reasonably consistent condition over the entire length. Although not one of the more intact walls in the Shire, its length and height are notable, and it retains a quite substantial presence.

The presence is greatly enhanced by its context of flat grassland, swampy depressions and farmland and the virtual absence of buildings in its immediate vicinity. It is perpendicular to the Western Highway, and its southern portion is clearly visible to city-bound traffic. It is in fact

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1   Stewart, G, 'The Newer Volcanics lava field between Deer Park and the Werribee River', *Geological Survey of Victoria, Unpublished Report* 1977/26, 1977, pp.4, 7.

2   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.162, 301, 349.

3   *ibid*

the only dry stone wall in the Shire of Melton that is in any way conspicuous to city-bound travellers on the Western Highway. It is effectively the only example of the significant Shire of Melton dry stone wall heritage that is visible to traffic proceeding eastwards along one of the most significant highways in the State.

At 1440 metres in length, it is one of the longest walls in the Shire. It is the 19th longest of the 303 walls for which length has been recorded, putting it well within the top ten percentile. It is almost three times the average length of the dry stone walls in the Shire.

It is also one of only 13% of all walls recorded in the Shire of Melton Dry Stone Walls Study that are over 1300 millimetres in height, the highest category of walls recorded in the Study.

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.[4] 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.[5] 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.[6] (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 homestation garden.[7])

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.'[8] 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).[9] 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,

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4   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.
5   Melton Heritage Study Place Nos. 467 and 81.

6   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
7   Melton Heritage Study, Place No.055
8   Kerr, *loc cit*
9   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.[10]

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.'[11] 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.[12] 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.'[13]

Likewise, the appearance of pluero-pneumonia in Australian cattle in the early 1860s impressed cattle-men of the need to isolate their properties from travelling or straying stock.[14] 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).[15]

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.[16]

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.[17]

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.[18]

• **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.'[19] 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.

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

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10   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).

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

12   Kerr, *loc cit*

13   Willingham, *op cit*, p.45

14   Kerr, *loc cit*

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

16   The *Australasian*, October 1876.

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

18   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'

19   Kerr, *loc cit*

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'.[20] 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'.[21] 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.[22] 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'.[23] 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.[24]

- **Dry Stone Walls**

In 1856 a government agricultural reporter travelling through the eastern part of Melton Shire (the Parish of Maribyrnong) commented that: 'A few good stone fences the only improvement worth noting.'[25]

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.'[26] 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.

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'.[27] 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.[28] 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.[29] 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 standard fence type from this time.[30]

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.[31] 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.[32] 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

20   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 Builded*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p.89.

21   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

22   Chandler, *op cit*, p.174

23   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.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

walling at the very low rate of only 8 shillings per chain.

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.[33])

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).[34]

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.[35] Property sale advertisements in the local paper suggest that the properties on the Keilor Plain east of Toolern

Creek were almost entirely walled.[36] Advertisements for stone wallers in the Buttlejorrk, 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.'[37]

These regular round stones lack interlocking, and often surface friction, and were never the ideal building material. The author of the 1848 'Rural Cyclopedia' considered round stones objectionable 'as they are ever rolling off'. The small wedge stones which held these round stones in position were easily dislodged.[38] Similarly, the 'round stone fence' surmounted by turf was described in Loudon's 1857 guide to British agriculture as a 'very indifferent fence', whose only apparent benefit

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33   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.

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

35   The *Australasian*, 28th October 1876

36   Bilszta, 1990, *op cit*.

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

38   Willingham, *op cit*, p.41

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 dislodged its copings, and 'great trouble and expense are annually required to keep it in repair.'[39] 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.[40]

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.[41] 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'.[42] 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.'[43] 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.'[44]

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.

History of the Place

The wall is situated in Section 7 Parish of Kororoit, and marks the boundary between three Crown Allotments (Nos. 2 on the west side, and 3 & 5 on the east side) that were sold under the Selection provisions of the Land Acts. On the east side of the wall the northernmost allotment (Crown Allotment 2, extending to Leakes Road) was selected by Digby Tarleton, and the southern one (Crown Allotment 5, also extending to Leakes Road), was selected by Isaac Gidney. The allotment on the west side of the wall (Crown Allotment 2) was selected by AT Frost.[45]

The land had previously been near the centre of the Rockbank 'farmers common',[46] the neighbouring farmers being permitted to graze stock there in proportion to the number of acres they cultivated. The appearance of the 'dread disease' pleuro pneumonia' on these commons there in 1864 had been a major cause of concern.[47] The land was opened for selection in 1867.

Early Melton settler Anders Hjorth recalled that a day or two before the Lands Board met to determine who would obtain the land there was a great influx of would-be selectors from different parts of Victoria, and even South Australia. 'They came in all sorts of conveyances, a good many in covered wagons'; the 'excitement was intense'.[48] The Lands Board, meeting in Bacchus Marsh, allocated the sites by ballot.

While the selection files held at the Public Records Office are usually a rich source of information regarding the description, extent and value of improvements (including fences and walls), unfortunately this is not so in relation to the selections on Section 7 Parish of Kororoit. All of the Gidney selections files are missing.[49]

39   Loudon, JC, *Encyclopaedia of Agriculture*, 5th Edition (Longman Brown Green Longmans and Roberts, London, 1857), p.496
40   Corangamite Arts Council, *op cit*, p.28
41   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
42   *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
43   Corangamite Arts Council, *op cit*, p.60
44   *ibid*, p.130

45   Parish Plan, Parish of Kororoit. (Note that the land was originally taken up under an earlier Land Act, but not alienated until after the passing of the 1869 Act.)
46   Bob Macdonald, 'History of Melton', typescript, October 1969, p.6
47   Anders Hjorth, 'Recollections of Melton 1861-67', in Melton & District Historical Society Newsletter, April 2001, pp.2-3
48   *loc cit*
49   PROV, VPRS 629/P/33 (File No.5949 in particular).

And the information provided for the Tarleton and Frost selections is unusually basic.[50]

Arthur Thomas Frost, who took up Crown Allotments 1 & 2 to the west of the wall in April 1867 is described in the file only as being from Riddells Creek. He appears to have taken over the selection from a Robert Johnson Sugden, who also had an interest in the allotments in April 1867.[51] AT Frost may have been a relation of Charles Frost, the Melton bootmaker who is reported to have also had a 'dairy at East Melton and when not at his trade had a horse and dray carrying goods to and from Melbourne'.[52] In September 1870 Frost successfully applied for his Selection lease to be replaced with a Crown grant. To have been entitled to make such an application Frost must have fenced the property boundary. Given the popularity of dry stone walls with selectors, and what is known about the survival of other selectors' dry stone walls, it is virtually certain that the existing wall (the eastern boundary of CA2), would have been constructed between April 1867 and September 1870.

The ratebooks of Braybrook Shire, within which the property was situated at the time, tell a little more about the ownership history of the allotments in this period. Gidney, Tarleton and Frost do not appear in the 1866 ratebooks, whereas in 1867 RJ Sugden (but not Frost) appears in association with Crown Allotments 1 and 2. (A George Gidney, perhaps a relation of Isaac, appears as a farmer/slaughterman, in the Parish of Cut Paw Paw, closer to Melbourne.) The 1868 ratebook shows that Frost has taken over Sugden's selection. Digby Tarleton also appears in 1868, apparently having taken over the selection of a Garnet Coghlan. Isaac Gidney suddenly appears as the owner or leesee of 6 selection allotments totalling some 550 acres in the Parish of Kororoit and 140 acres in the Parish of Cut Paw Paw. Each of his Kororoit selections is taken up in partnership. In the case of the allotment adjacent to the wall (Crown Allotments 5) his partner is a Slater Mawson. This allotment has no dwelling marked, and there is no other evidence that a house was ever built on Gidney's allotments east of and adjacent to the wall. On the other hand a 'house' is recorded on his allotment on the opposite (eastern) side of Leakes Road, on the north-eastern corner of Western Highway, and a 'hut' on the allotments to the north of this.

It is of note that the valuation of the Sugden/Frost property increased between the years 1867 and 1868, but not between 1868 and the year 1870, at which time the wall must definitely have been built. It is very likely then that the 1867-68 increase in valuation was due to the construction of fencing/walls, as there was no house recorded on the property, and fences/walls were usually the first or one of the first major improvement made on new farms.[53]

In May 1873 Gidney received the Crown grant for the southern property on the east side of the wall, and in October 1873 Tarleton received the Crown grant for the northern property on the east side of the wall.[54]

In the selection file, the occupation of Digby Tarleton of Melton in 1867 is given as 'dairyman'.[55] A seaman before taking up land in Rockbank, Digby married Mary Burns, daughter of famous Melton midwife Hanna 'Grannie' Watts, after whom Melton's main park on Toolern Creek is named. There are numerous photographs of Digby and his descendents in Starr's history of Melton.[56] He became a cattle dealer with another Melton pioneer Harry Minns.[57] His business was substantial enough to be noted in Harry H Peck's celebrated memoirs of the Newmarket Stockyards as they were in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With John Kirk, Harry Minns and John Dickins, he is described as one of the 'distinct personalities who were regular suppliers to Newmarket from their farms close to town'. Peck notes that Digby was by his accent 'Yorkshire or Lancashire':

'Short and spare with little curly locks, active and quick-tempered, Digby with his light-weight had the sense to keep out of bodily encounters; he was hard to beat in a verbal one.'[58]

Digby 'went bust' in the drought of 1882.[59] This may have been the reason he left his Selection. He was killed in 1895. The family continued on in different farms in the Rockbank and Toolern Vale areas. In

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50   PROV, VPRS 629/P/37 (File No.7580); VPRS 629/P/4 (File No.677).
51   PROV, VPRS 629/P/4 (File 677)
52   Alexander Cameron, 'Melton Memoirs' (M&DHS), p.9

53   PROV, VPRS 1695/P/1, Shire of Braybrook Ratebooks, 1866-1870. Note that ratebook records can be some 12 months behind actual events.
54   Parish Plan, Parish of Kororoit.
55   PROV, VPRS 629/P/37 (File No.7580)
56   Starr, J, *Melton: Plains of Promise* (Shire of Melton, nd, c.1985), pp.100-109. The book's statement that Digby arrived in Australia in 1871 is clearly wrong.
57   Leo Tarleton, personal conversation, 27th December 2001.
58   Peck, Harry H, *Memoirs of a Stockman* (Stock and Land Co, Melbourne, 1972), p.123
59   Leo Tarleton, personal conversation, 27th December 2001.

1906 his son George took up a Closer Settlement allotment on what is now Tarletons Road, less than two kilometres from his father's original selection. In 1952 they purchased the property Bonnie Doon also on Tarleton's Road.[60] The association with Newmarket continued: son George bred the 'first Friesian cow to reach £100 at market'; George's son Leo, grandson of Digby, is photographed holding the cow at the Newmarket saleyards, with a group that includes Jim Minns, grandson of Digby's partner Harry Minns.[61] Although Mary Tolhurst (Digby's granddaughter) and other members of the Tarleton family remain in the Melton area, in the early 1990's Leo Tarleton moved the farm to Boort. Subdivision activities and projected rezonings in the Melton area had impacted on the long term viability of farming.[62]

Ratebooks indicate that by 1889 neither Frost nor Tarleton remained on their selections. By the 1880s good prices were being offered for Rockbank land, and Melbourne speculators, fired by the land boom, looked to buy land near new railway lines such as that which reached Rockbank in the early 1880s. However it was Gidney who purchased their lands. By 1889 ten properties totalling over 2,700 acres (c.1100 hectares) were in the occupation of Isaac, Charles, Henry and John Gidney, who describe themselves as 'dealers'. Most of these properties appear to have been actually owned by the Gidneys, with the exception of two which are leased from the executors of deceased estates, including that of William Tulloh (of *Strathtulloh*). All of the Gidney properties are marked as being entirely 'fenced', and some have a number of houses.[63] An 1892 map shows 'I Gidney' as the owner occupier of the entire extent of land north of the Western Highway and south of Beattys Road, between Paines Road in the west and to the Beattys Road crossing of Kororoit Creek in the east (over 1400 acres, or 580 ha). He had acquired the land of all the other selectors in this area: Frost, Tarleton, Frazer, Quaile, Mathews and Howard. At this time Gidney also possessed another c.500 (200 ha) acres nearby, to the south of the Western Highway.[64] At the same time he had disposed of one of his smaller relatively selections on the north side of Kororoit Creek (the site of the house

Bonnie Doon on Tarletons Road) to WJT Clarke. While this was the only one of his properties with stream frontage, there were two Water Reserves very close to his main property.

Isaac Gidney cropped, made hay, grazed stock and bred remount horses for the India service on this Rockbank property, which he called '*Spring Farm*'.[65] A native of Norwich England, he had made money supplying goods to goldfields and in the 1860s set up as a successful dealer. He was then living in Abbotsford Street North Melbourne. He invested heavily in land particularly in Shire of Braybrook, and also had land in the Parish of Maribyrnong under family management, and in the Parish of Pywheitjorrk under lease. In 1886 he sent for his brother who arrived to manage *Spring Farm*.

Whilst Isaac Gidney himself continued to reside in North Melbourne (moving from Abbotsford Street to 'Hotham Villa' in Dryburgh Street), his sons and nephews travelled extensively in pursuit of their business shipping horses between Melbourne and India. Nephew William, son of John, who worked on *Spring Farm*, died of Colonial fever in Madras in 1884 whilst managing a shipment of horses.

Charles Gidney and his descendents inherited *Spring Farm*. By the mid twentieth century it had begun to be sold out of the family. In early 1942 Sections 2 and 3 (202 acres) were developed as the United States Army receiving station for the Pacific War. Towards the end of the year, after major victories, the United States forces moved north and the station was developed as the Australian Army Signals (Receiving) Station. By 1952 the Army was looking to greatly expand its operations as part of the UK Army Wireless Chain and the AMF Command Communications System. The owners of the additional 884 acres that the Army sought to acquire were Mrs EM Hughes, 'daughter of Mrs Gidney' (604 acres), and Mr G Harrison (279 acres).[66] There were three dwellings on the property, one of which was 'owned by Mrs Hughes and is approximately 100 years old … in poor condition'. It was at the time being rented by a Mr Jazar for 13 shillings 6 pence per week. This Hughes house was situated on Crown Allotment 1B, on the north-eastern corner of the Western Highway

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60   Melton *Express* 26/4/1952

61   Starr, *op cit*, p.109

62   Mary Tolhurst, personal conversation, August 2005

63   PROV, VPRS 1696/P/1, Shire of Braybrook Ratebook, 1889. The ratebooks of 1880 and 1888 similarly note that the Gidney properties were all fenced.

64   Shire Map Series, 1892: Parishes of Kororoit and Pywheitjorrk.

65   The following biographical information on Isaac Gidney is Judith Bilsztas's research of genealogical (BDM etc) sources; *Victoria and its Metropolis*; the *Australasian* newspaper; the Bacchus Marsh *Express* and the 'Vertical Files' in the RHSV collection.

66   The Bacchus Marsh *Express*, 29th March 1952.

and Leakes Road (where the Signals personnel estate was built in the 1960s).[67] This was almost certainly the Gidney house that was noted in on these allotments (Crown Allotments 1 and 8) in the 1868 ratebook.

The other two houses noted in 1952 were built in the early twentieth century, and were occupied by Mr A Missen and Mr Harrison.[68] Others Rockbank families associated with the former *Spring Farm* in more recent years included Peacock and and Summers. In Pywheitjorrk, the Misses Smith purchased the Gidney land to add to their *Strathtulloh* holding. *Spring Farm* had had a large stable complex of bluestone and split palings a short distance off Ballarat Road. Remnants of the stables could be seen in the paddock adjacent to the Western Highway east of Leakes Road until the mid 1980's. A 1916 map shows an intense pattern of walls near the stable location. This land was eventually purchased by Harold Missen.

There appears never to have been a house constructed on the allotments originally selected by Gidney on the western side of Leakes Road (Sections 5 and 6A), adjacent to the wall. However by 1916 a house does appear on the allotment on the western side of the wall (the Sugden/Frost selection); this was perhaps an early building, or else not very substantial, as it was gone by 1938.[69]

The pattern of dry stone walls shown in the 1916 map matches almost exactly the boundaries of the original properties that were offered to selectors. This indicates that the majority of walls were built in the original selection phase. Within a decade or two so much land was in the hands of a single owner. This wall (N224) and a short and more deteriorated remnant of a wall along Leakes Road (N241) are the only remnants of Selection in this region.

The wall also comprises the most substantial evidence of Isaac Gidney's *Spring Farm*, and the business of trade of horses and chaff for the India Army, which was a significant business in the districts of Melton, Braybrooks and Werribee.

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67 Army Ordnance Map, 1916: 'Sunbury'; also NAA MT1131/1, CE Drawing No.7142 341.12.
68 National Archives of Australia, Series MT1131/1, Unit A259/18/297, AMF Minute Paper, 12/2/1953.
69 Army Ordnance Maps, 1916, 1938. Another house appears on the original Tarleton selection on the west side of Leakes Road. It is however situated on an early 5 acre excision from the Tarleton selection (Crown Allotment 4B), which does not abut the wall.

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

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

Comparable Places in Shire of Melton:

* This is one of very few, and by far the most prominent, of the dry stone walls on the north side of the Western Highway. The other walls - Nos.N232, N241 and N212 – are nowhere near as substantial, or as intact, and are effectively undetectable to traffic. Effectively, Wall N224 is the only dry stone wall in the Shire of Melton that is visible to city-bound traffic (travelling in an easterly direction). As such it is of very high importance to the public image of the Shire of Melton's as a place with an important heritage of dry stone walls.

* Wall N224, built c.1867-68, is one of the most substantial surviving structures, of any sort, associated with the historical 'Selection Act' foundation of Rockbank in the the 1860s and 70s.

It is the most substantial and prominent of the few dry stone walls of the Rockbank selection district that now survive. The only comparable walls in terms of length are those on Leakes Road south of the Western Highway (Walls J150-152), associated with the original George Missen selection. Other extant walls associated with 'Selection Acts' at Rockbank are now very much remnants, usually short and highly deteriorated vestiges of the originals.

These walls are among the most substantial surviving structures of any sort associated with the Rockbank selections. No houses in the district date from the 1860s/70s 'Selection Act' period. The only early houses in the district were built after this period:- 1957-1963 Western Highway (built c.1895 for George Missen); 2341 Western Highway (built 1898 for George Pitson); and 107-121 Water Reserve Road (built c.1900/1913). The only place in any way comparable in terms of date is the former Rose & Crown Hotel, built 1875 but now much altered (the office for the Sundowner Caravan Park).

Condition:

Overall the wall is in Good-Fair condition.

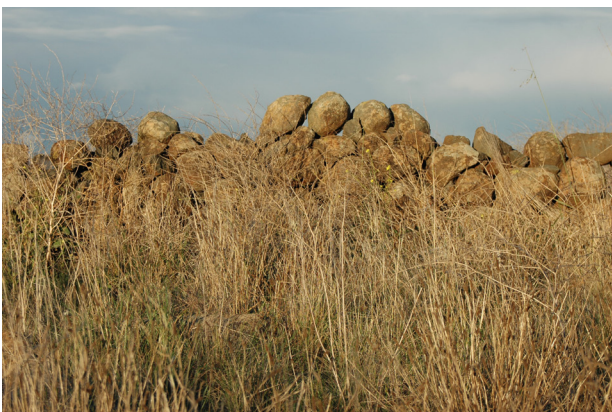**Integrity:**

Fair

Recommendations:

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.

Other Recommendations:

•   Planning controls should ensure that the visibility of the road from the Western Highway on its western (approach) side is retained. This would ensure that the view of the wall is not impeded by new buildings.

•   The location of the wall gives it considerable strategic significance in promoting the heritage and image of the Shire of Melton as a place significant for dry stone walls. The restoration of at least the southern part of the wall should be given priority in the Shire of Melton. Interpretation of the wall should be part of such conservation works. It is recommended that grass be kept mown, at least on its south- western (approach) side, as part of such conservation and interpretation.

Wall N224.

Something of a sense of the length of the wall (in the middle distance) is evident from the the Western Highway at its southern end. The bushes (probably self-sown) help trace its form.

Wall N224.

The northern (Beattys Road) end of the wall has been topped up with a post and wire fence inserted into one side, and the wall itself has evidently been inexpertly topped up in the past. The dense rocks with which the wall was built can also be seen here;(these round stones are more evident in the photograph on the title page of this report).

Wall N224.

A section of the southern part of the wall in typically variable condition. Its height is evident behind the tall grass impeding its view.