Citation No. 4 - Mount Atkinson Dry Stone Wall Precinct

Melton Dry Stone Walls Survey Nos: (See description)

Location: Hopkins Road, Boundary Road, Middle Road, Truganina

Critical Dates: Original construction of most c.late 1850s – 1870s;
extensive reconstruction of most Rocklands walls c.1930s

Existing Heritage Listings: HO 114

Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL

Statement of Significance:

The Mount Atkinson Dry Stone Wall Precinct is a group of characteristic and distinctive Shire of Melton walls built c.late 1850s to 1870s. It is significant at the LOCAL level as the densest concentration of dry stone walls in the Shire, for its demonstration of rural settlement patterns; for its demonstration of the early farming settlement of South Derrimut (Truganina / Tarneit), which was particularly dry, and partly isolated by the surrounding huge *Rockbank* pastoral estate;   for its associations with gold-rush land speculators and the issue of closed roads on pastoral estates; for its demonstration of skilled craftsmanship; for the evocative names of two of its major properties – *Rocklands* and *Rockbank*; and for its potential to provide both research and educative information regarding nineteenth century farming and pastoral practices on Melbourne's western plains.

The Mount Atkinson Dry Stone Wall Precinct is historically significant at the LOCAL level (AHC A3, A4, B2, D2). The precinct demonstrates the early pastoral and farming settlement patterns of Melbourne's western plains. It is significant as the densest group of dry stone walls in the Shire of Melton. The walls express nineteenth century small farming practices, and the particular difficulties of water supply and transport that hindered farming in this region. The precinct is framed by two original *Rockbank* boundary walls, associated with WJT Clarke and his son Sir WJ Clarke. Some of the dry stone walls in the precinct are the best evidence of the widespread activity of land speculators along gold-rush routes in Melton Shire, and more widely across Melbourne's western plains, that is known to survive. The walls along Mt Atkinson Road and Hopkins Road are almost certainly associated with the controversial issue of 'closed roads' on pastoral estates.

The precinct includes some excellent high and long all-stone walls (eg Wall B118), and composite stone and post & wire, with characteristic broad-based and pyramidal (rather than vertical) section. They are expressive of the historical diversity of dry stone wall construction in Victoria and are representative of the dominant type of wall in Melton Shire, and Melbourne's west. The shape of the walls is largely a function of the high proportion of round and smooth stones, which are characteristic of Melbourne's western plains. The precinct also contains excellent examples of original composite low stone and post and wire walls, including what is probably the best preserved example of this significant type of wall in the Shire (Wall B46 on Middle Road). An immensely significant stone structure in the precinct is the small dam on *Rocklands* (Wall B44). The precinct is also significant for its ongoing association with the Hopkins family, three of whom were Braybrook Shire Councillors (and one a President) in the nineteenth century, and after whom Hopkins Road is named; the family still occupies the late 1850s *Rocklands* homestead and farms the property.

The Mount Atkinson Dry Stone Wall Precinct is aesthetically significant at the LOCAL level (AHC E1). Some of the individual walls have good sculptural qualities, and are expressive of the craftsmanship of their builders. Although the landscape is flat and the walls generally follow the grid pattern of roads and subdivisions, the relative concentration of walls enables some landscape views of multiple walls. The views to and from the homestead and gardens of *Rocklands*, to the open farmland to the north, west and east are highly evocative of its C19th pastoral origins. The garden setting of the homestead, with high walls to enclose stock, C19th garden plants and mature plantation trees, is rare for its intactness and visual cohesion as a C19th farm landscape, in an area undergoing rapid urbanization.

The Mount Atkinson Dry Stone Wall Precinct is scientifically significant at the LOCAL level (A1, C2). The precinct demonstrates the volcanic origin of the landscape, and is associated with the Mount Atkinson 'Lava Hill'. The walls have the potential to yield research information regarding wall construction techniques, nineteenth century rural settlement patterns and farm management, and ways of life on Melbourne's western plains.

The Mount Atkinson Dry Stone Wall Precinct is socially significant at the LOCAL level (AHC G1). The precinct 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 Mount Atkinson Dry Stone Wall Precinct is of LOCAL significance.

The following extract from Council's GIS records all the walls in the Mount Atkinson Precinct (Hopkins Road District):

WALL NO	NEAREST ROAD
B115	Mt Atkinson Road
B116	Mt Atkinson Road
B117	Mt Atkinson Road
B118	Boundary Road

B119	Boundary Road
B120	Boundary Road
B121	Hopkins Road
B122	Hopkins Road
B123	Hopkins Road
B124	Hopkins Road
B125	Hopkins Road
B126	Hopkins Road
B127	Hopkins Road
B130	Hopkins Road
B169	Hopkins Road
B170	Hopkins Road
B38	Hopkins Road
B39	Hopkins Road
B40	Middle Road
B41	Middle Road
B42	Middle Road
B43	Middle Road
B45	Middle Road
B46	Middle Road
B47	Hopkins Road
G84	Mt Atkinson Road
G85	Boundary Road

Description:

The source of the fieldstone used in the construction of the walls in the precinct is Mount Atkinson, one 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. Mt Atkinson is described by geologists as a 'Lava Hill', a source of extended flows of lava whose crater is now 'absent or ambiguous'.[1]

Unlike many of the volcanoes on Victoria's western plains, Mt Atkinson, a low hill south of Rockbank, does not lend a dramatic and distinctive character to its flat landscape. Its normally fluid lava flow became more viscous towards the end of the vent's eruptive phase, and built up a ridge that extends two kilometres east of the vent. The lava from the volcano extended mainly to the north, east and south in broad, thin flows, influencing the present course of Kororoit Creek. The western extent of its lava flows is an unnamed gully which marks the boundary between the Mt Cottrell and the Mt Atkinson flows. (Mt Atkinson is the younger of the two volcanoes.)[2]

The longest of the Mt Atkinson lava flows extended to the south-east, that is, to the location of the present Mount Atkinson Dry Stone Walls Precinct. The tongues of lava it extruded were effusive, and slowly cooling, producing a denser basalt, in contrast to more explosive eruptions, or quickly cooling flows, which produced a more vesicular scoria or tuff. The basalt it produced has a slightly finer grain than the Mt Cottrell basalt.[3] Although, as in the Mt Cottrell Dry Stone Walls Precinct, the vesicularity of the stone varies, a higher percentage of the stone in the Mt Atkinson dry stone walls are smooth, round and dense, providing less friction for good wall building.

Surveyors divided the extensive plains into square mile allotments, and created roads on a massive grid. This grid dominates the form of the Mt Atkinson dry stone wall landscape today, with the majority of walls built along the roads or perpendicular to them, forming property boundaries or internal paddocks. The landscape is completely flat, diminishing the ability to view a pattern of walls, but the open character of most of the area does enable some views of multiple walls.

This is the most concentrated collection of walls in the Shire. Most were built by neighbouring early farming families: the Hopkins' (descendents of who still own, occupy and work *Rockbank*) and Faragher families. Like nearly all farms in the Shire, they were almost surrounded by the Clarke pastoral estate, and these Clarke boundary walls define the western and northern boundaries of the precinct. The Hopkins' (now Bitans') family's *Rocklands* homestead (HO 114) is a painted bluestone Victorian styled house, built around the late 1850s (and extended later) on a site settled a few years earlier. It is particularly distinguished by an exceptional complex of substantial and extensive all-stone dry stone wall cattle and sheep yards (c.1.5 metres high), with associated milking shed & farm outbuildings. Although of these walls were apparently rebuilt, with lesser skill, after the 1930s depression, they are solidly constructed on original foundations, and some have neat copings. There are some huge stones at the bases of some of the walls. One wall of a shed is a dry stone wall. There is a very old peppercorn tree beside a rear wall. Lower dry stone paddock walls beyond the homestead precinct also contribute to an understanding of the nineteenth century farming history of the place.

In front of the house is an apparently very early, well built and remarkably intact stock dam, c.3 metres deep and c.25 metres long. It has cobbled or pitched stone paving on an inclined ramp at the south end. Its embankment includes double tiers of dry stone walling, quite steeply set, on the west and east sides, with lower courses roughly 'squared'. The paved stock entrance ramp is at the south end of the horseshoe shaped structure.

The rather spare ornamental garden of *Rocklands* is typical of this particularly dry district, in which peppercorns, eucalypts and other native species (including the very old saltbush) are the most successful species; the stunted specimens of old pine trees sometimes encountered along the north side of Boundary Road (presumably planted by the former Braybrook Shire), also underline the dry and gaunt nature of the district.

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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.20, 349, 373
2 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
3 *ibid*

To the south of *Rocklands* is *Tibbermore*, which was established at the same time by the Faragher family, although the present weatherboard house dates substantially from 1903. (Its front verandah was burnt in the 1969 fire that devastated the area.) Adjacent to the house are old cow yards, constructed of dry stone walls, associated with a former milking shed. The numerous stone walls on the property are generally as they are shown in the 1916 map. They include a substantially intact all-stone driveway wall, and the substantial 'one mile' dry stone wall (most of this one mile north-south wall survives) situated to the west of house, sections of which are very intact (Wall B118).
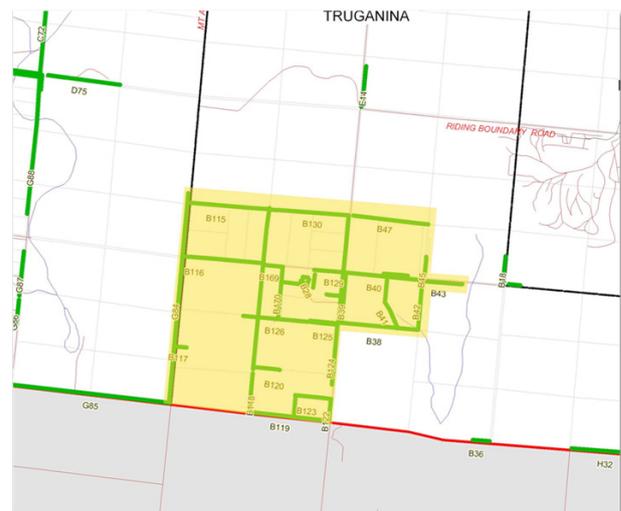
On the neighbouring property some 500 metres to the west of *Tibbermore* is a bluestone ruin (originally the Killeen's house) burnt out in the 1969 fire. About 150 metres east of this ruin is an empty but quite intact small-medium sized old shallow-styled farm dam with walls built of fieldstone: c.15m long, c.2.5 m deep (including earth embankments).

The field-stone from which the walls in the precinct have been constructed are predominantly round, heavy, and medium to large in size. Accordingly, most walls lack coursing. The walls in this precinct are thus the typical style of wall in Melton Shire. Round stones are not the ideal material for construction of high (low batter) walls, and most of the walls are more pyramidal than vertical in cross-section. Some walls (eg Wall B42) retain clear evidence of original composite stone ('half-walls') and post-and-wire construction. These include very low stone walls with post-and-wire fences; this type of wall, clearly purpose-built although their purpose is unknown, is quite widespread throughout the Shire. Wall B46 on Middle Road is probably the best stone wall of this type, in terms of condition and length, in the whole of Melton Shire.

However many, perhaps most, walls in the precinct appear to have originally been all-stone constructions into which posts and steel droppers with between 1 and 4 wires have since been worked. These post-and-wire "top-ups" appear to have occurred in order to supplement the maintenance and height of the walls. In common with most old dry stone walls on Victoria's western volcanic plains, while often retaining sections in near original condition, most of the walls are generally in a state of declining condition. Inevitably, over the years many have lost copings, sagged and spread, and some have tumbled down in parts. It is noticeable

that in general walls on the major thoroughfares are in considerably worse condition than internal paddock walls. Many have sizeable gaps, which have been created by theft of stones, presumably for suburban gardens.

Mt Atkinson (Hopkins Road) dry stone wall precinct

History:

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

Fencing in Nineteenth Century Rural 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.[1] 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

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1 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.

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.[2] 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.[3] (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.[4])

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.'[5] 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).[6] 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, to construct stockyards, fowl houses and pigpens, and possibly, on a few of the larger farms, to provide aesthetic effect.[7]

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.'[8] 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.[9] Western District squatter Neil Black quickly enclosed his Glenormiston run, and in 1854 George Russell

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2　Melton Heritage Study Place Nos. 467 and 81.
3　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
4　Melton Heritage Study, Place No.055
5　Kerr, *loc cit*
6　Shire Map Series (1892); Army Ordnance Map, 1916: 'Sunbury'.

7　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).
8　Murray, E, *The Plains of Iramoo*, Henwood & Dancy, Geelong, 1974, p.111. (Murray notes that in 1974 these walls were still standing.)
9　Kerr, *loc cit*

ordered five miles of wire: '…the importance of fencing is becoming every year more apparent.'[10] 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.[11] 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).[12]

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.[13]

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.[14]

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.[15]

- **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.'[16] As is the case with the rest of the Shire, most of the walls in the Mount Atkinson 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 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'.[17] 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'.[18] 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.[19] 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'.[20] 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

10   Willingham, *op cit*, p.45
11   Kerr, *loc cit*
12   Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1864, p.94 ; John Chandler, Michael Canon, *Forty Years in the Wilderness* (Loch Haven, Main Ridge, 1990), p.175
13   The *Australasian*, October 1876.
14   Bilszta, JA, 'Dry Stone Wall: Faulkners Road, Mt Cottrell, Shire of Melton', 9/9/1990, unpublished paper
15   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'

16   Kerr, *loc cit*
17   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.
18   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
19   Chandler, J, Forty Years in the Wilderness, Loch Haven, 1990, p.174
20   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.)

fence' in the same year.[21]

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'.[22] 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.[23] 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.[24] 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.[25]

• **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.'[26]

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.'[27] 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.[28] 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.[29] 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 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.[30])

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).[31]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

30 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.

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

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.[32] Property sale advertisements in the local paper suggest that the properties on the Keilor Plain east of Toolern Creek were almost entirely walled.[33] 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 (this Mount Atkinson Precinct), 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.'[34]

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.[35] 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 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.'[36] 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.[37]

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.[38] 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'.[39] 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

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32   The *Australasian*, 28th October 1876
33   Bilszta, 1990, *op cit*.
34   Corangamite Arts Council, *op cit*, p.58

35   Willingham, *op cit*, p.41
36   Loudon, JC, *Encyclopaedia of Agriculture*, 5th Edition (Longman Brown Green Longmans and Roberts, London, 1857), p.496
37   Corangamite Arts Council, *op cit*, p.28
38   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
39   *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

subdivide the property into paddocks if the field stone was so abundant as to allow these.'[40] 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.'[41]

• **Composite Walls**

In the study area, and Melbourne's western plains area, most of the remnant early fences are a combination of low stone walls with spit timber post with wire above (or, more rarely, timber rail). Many, perhaps the majority, of 'half walls' in Victoria were constructed because of limited availability of fieldstone.[42] Peel states what is likely to be the primary reason for their construction:-

'With increasing distance from a timber supply, less timber was used in fence construction and wire fences, or stone walls in the stony country, became more common. Again, where less stone was available, stone walls and wire fences were combined, with the stone wall portion consisting of anything from a single row of stones to a substantial wall three or more feet high with only one or two wires on top.'[43]

For example, says Peel, timber for the Sunbury vicinity was sourced from the Mount Macedon area, but as Sunbury was also at the edge of stony country, split timber, stone and wire were all used, commonly in the same fence.[44] And, as Vines has shown, the 'combination' fencing is also common on the Keilor and Werribee plains.[45] The reason for part stone wall - part wire fences of the Melton Shire study area relates to the quantity of stone in the area. And so the most typical stone fence of the study area reflects the particular geography and history of the Melton Shire, and is important for this reason.

Many other of Victoria's composite stone walls would appear to be the remnants of original all-stone walls that were later repaired by part-demolition and incorporation of post & wire fencing, or else just built up to a 'workable height' by the addition of post & wire

fencing (perhaps to accommodate a transition from sheep to cattle).[46] Mitchell states that 'Stone walls … have since been electrified or had post and wire worked into their construction'.[47] Other examples of such walls have been recorded.[48]

Some 'composite' stone walls were definitely not built as such. Farmers sometimes gathered 'floaters' as they appeared, stacking them under fences, making a rubble stone fence, rather than a professionally built 'dry stone wall'. Melton farmer Mary Tolhurst had stone walls on her childhood property, but also tells how, prior to sowing a crop, the men would take the horse and dray and pick up stones and place them along and under the property's post & wire and post and rail fences.[49]

However the construction of half stone walls was not always simply an accidental by-product of the amount of fieldstone available, or deterioration of original walls, or need to increase wall height, or the need to progressively clear land. An 1861 treatise on fencing by a Scottish manufacturer includes a diagram showing wire fencing on top of stone walls.[50] And experiments with combining fencing materials to most economic effect were undertaken early in Australia. In 1851 John Learmonth in the Western District erected a boundary fence in which the lowest rail was replaced by a stone dyke (or wall).[51] It appeared to Learmonth: 'that in some part this would add little to the expense, and at the same time would add to the durability and safety from fires.' Contracts for the same fences were being deliberately let in 1927, when a 'two foot walls with cope stone on a 2'6" base, with barb wire' was built at Turkeith near Birregurra.[52]

In the Shire of Melton 'half-stone walls' – with the stone less than 18 inches high – were also built deliberately. The exact reasons are probably lost to time, but present farmers know that they had benefits in terms of preventing sheep crawling under the lower wire, and in preventing draught horses from scratching itch mites in the hairs of their legs.[53]

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40 Corangamite Arts Council, *op cit*, p.60
41 *ibid*, p.130
42 Corangamite Arts Council, *op cit*, p.80
43 Peel, LJ, *Rural Industry in the Port Phillip Region 1835-1880*, MUP, 1974, p.108
44 Peel, *op cit*, p 108.
45 Vines, G, *Built To Last; An Historical and Archaeological Survey of Dry Stone Walls in Melbourne's Western Region* (Living Museum of the West Inc, 1990).

46 Vines, 1995, *op cit*, p.60
47 Mitchell, H, 'Building Dry Stone Walls', *Grass Roots*, No.48, April 1985
48 Richard Peterson, Daniel Catrice, 'Bacchus Marsh Heritage Study', 1994
49 Mary Tolhurst, February 2002.
50 Willingham, o*p cit*, p.46
51 Kerr, *op cit*. (Dyke was the Scottish word for stone wall.)
52 Mary Sheehan (author of Colac Otway Heritage Study), 11/8/2005
53 Personal conversations, John Morton, and Charlie Finch.

Many of the Melton composite stone and wire walls have neat coping stones intact. These all appear to have been built in the traditional manner in relation to base width and double wall construction (perhaps to comply with the Fences Act definition of a 'sufficient' wall). Other composite walls are less neatly constructed. These generally have a higher percentage of round-shaped stones, and consequently a higher wall batter and a more pyramidal, less vertical, shape. While some of these have obviously had posts inserted into them, it is also possible that some might have always been composite walls. The relative instability of stone walls built with the 'round stone' that predominates in Melton Shire may also have encouraged the original wall constructions to have been kept low, and topped up with wire.[1]

Our natural association of 'the richest areas for dry stone walls'[2] with areas where fieldstone is most abundant is not the complete explanation for the different extent and quality of stone wall construction in different areas. While the availability of stone is the 'supply' side of the equation, there is also a 'demand' side: the need for fencing; and the economic feasibility of clearing land and building walls.

As mentioned previously, both historical and present maps of dry stone walls in Melton Shire show strikingly greater densities of walls in farming areas than on large pastoral properties. This is despite the fact that in this Mount Atkinson Precinct (in the Parish of Derrimut) and also in the adjacent Parish of Pywheitjorrk, both the pastoral and farming land-uses are situated in exactly the same volcanic landscape. So, while the greatest numbers of extant walls in the Shire were built as part the Clarkes' vast Rockbank pastoral estate, the greatest concentrations are situated on medium and small sized farms. Another contrast between pastoral and farming properties evident in the fieldwork undertaken for this Study is that in all but one case (Clarke's boundary wall No.F96 on Faulkners Road) the most substantial stone walls – the most 'all-stone' and the highest walls – are also to be found on farms and small grazing properties rather than on the large pastoral estates.

Farms had a greater need for fencing, in order to separate stock from crops, and for construction of dairy yards, small dams, pigsties and cowsheds, than did large sheep-runs, which only required fencing of boundaries and large paddocks. This more intensive use of the land would also have meant that it was worth investing more in the land, including clearing the property of fieldstone. Whereas land needed to be cleared for crops, and to maximise grass for cattle on small farms, less complete (if any) clearing of land was required to make huge flocks of sheep economical. For example, in the 1890s parts of the Chirnside Brothers great Werribee Park pastoral estate were let to tenant farmers: 'The Chirnsides retained the "rocky" country, which was not fit for cultivation, but which was quite good grazing country, growing a nice quality of wool.'[3] And there was comparatively little demand for fencing on the vast paddocks in the southern part of the Clarkes' Rockbank estate. While the evidence of the nearby small farms indicates that there was sufficient stone to build at least some substantial all-stone walls, it was not economical (or perhaps necessary) to build such walls for sheep paddocks.

The situation was different for farmers. At least three of the 21 selectors examined in the district (the Holden area) had stone coverage that was too expensive to clear. The Land Department inspector reported on Ellen Slattery's selection, which appears to have been the worst: 'I consider the land to be unfit for cultivation; it would cost from £20 to £30 per acre to clear some part of it, as it is a mass of rock.'[4] While most of the volcanic plains would have cost much less than this to clear, even with a very conservative estimate of only £1 or £2 per acre, stone clearing would still have been a substantial cost likely to have been economical only for the more intensive land uses; that is, for farming rather than pastoralism.[5] Being unskilled work, farmers (and their sons and itinerant labourers) would also be in a position to do it themselves cheaply.

So, even if there was sufficient fieldstone to build substantial stone walls, it was not always economical to clear it. In Australia the comparatively large size of landholdings, the high cost of fencing from scratch, and the predominantly pastoral land use, is likely to have had a significant influence on the form of stone wall

1   Loudon, *loc cit*
2   Eg, Vines, 1995, *op cit*, p.58

3   Morris, G, 'Centennial History, Werribee', extract obtained from *Werribee Banner*, 5th April 1962.
4   PROV VPRS 625 Unit 304 (20712), Inspector Yeoman, 10/9/1875
5   Figures provided by selector Alexander McLeod, whose density of rocks appears to have been unremarkable and may have been light, suggest that he spent approximately £1-2 per acre on 'clearing stone and sundries' (PROV VPRS 625, Unit 273 (18276)).

built. Whereas in Europe there is a high proportion of high all-stone walls, in Australia paddocks with enough stone to build high all-stone walls may not have been economical to clear.[6] In the Melton Shire exceptions to this occurred in the larger and more successful mid-nineteenth century farms and small grazing properties (such as the Moylan, Beaty and Hopkins properties), on which some substantial stone walls (generally near the homestead) were constructed. The other major exceptions in Melton are the large and finely built Clarke dry stone wall dams. These, together with the magnificent boundary walls built by the Manifolds in the Western District to protect against rabbits, also support a conclusion that the use of stone was related not just to its quantity (the supply), but also to the special needs of the owners (the demand): for farming; or to countervail the peculiarly dry climate on Melton plains; or to combat the devastating rabbit plague on the Stony Rises. Cultural circumstances, for example, the local pool of skills in the Western District, and local traditions (such as belief in stone walls as a fire retardant), no doubt also played a part.[7]

Analysis of the 21 Selection Act files provides some grounds for arguing that the composite walls, such as 'post & wire and stone', may in fact have been particularly associated with the Melton district. The printed forms upon which selectors were asked to mark the improvements to their properties included 11 types of fences. However, these 11 options did not include categories for the most common type of fence in the district:- the composite 'post & wire & stone' (or 'post & rail & wire & stone') fence. Yet at least 5 of the 21 selectors in the district describe these types of fences on their selections, marking additions such as 'stone bottom' to the 'post and wire' category (Patrick O'Brien). It is likely that the lack of category meant that others again (in addition to these five) simply selected one of

the given types to describe their composite walls; some probably called their 'half stone' fences either 'stone walling' or 'post & wire' or 'post & rail' fences. (As such, it is likely that much of the fencing described as 'stone' and other categories was actually composite post & wire and stone. The price of the different type of walls would support the possibility that some 30% of the fencing built by these selectors was in fact post & wire and stone.)

One conclusion that could be drawn from the Selection Act pro-formas is that composite 'post & wire and stone' and 'post & wire & rail and stone' walls/fences were variants that were particularly associated with Melbourne's western plains. Alternatively, they may have been variants that became more common throughout the whole of Victoria around the time of the Selection Acts.

Composite stone and post & wire walls appear to characterise Melton Shire in a way that they do not elsewhere. But they are not confined to Melton Shire or Melbourne's western and northern plains. Examples are to be found in virtually all of the stone wall districts of Victoria, although they would appear to be small minority in some districts. There are also known to be many in New Zealand's Otago area, at least some in North America, but virtually none in Europe. The questions that remain, and can only ultimately be answered by further studies in other regions, is whether they are in fact the most common type of fence in Victoria as some claim, and whether they are more concentrated and numerous in Melton Shire and the Melbourne fringe than elsewhere.

History of the Place

All of the land in the precinct is situated in the Parish of Derrimut. It was subdivided by the Crown into allotments of c.100 acres, and sold in either May or November 1854. There were nine different purchasers of the ten Crown Allotments in the Mount Atkinson Precinct.

All of the land to the north of the Precinct – most of the Parish of Derrimut – had been purchased by WJT ('Big') Clarke at the same Crown Land sales.[8] South of the precinct, in the Parish of Tarneit (in the Shire of Wyndham), c.160 acre allotments along Boundary

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6   Gary Vines, posting in Heritage Chat, 11/8/2005
7   While it has not been analysed, it would seem that many of the large stone walls in the Western District (eg, the Kolora, Derrinallum and Purrumbete areas) were built by farmers c.1900 (Corangamite Arts Council, 1995, pp.76-142 and *passim*). The primary reason for the farmers' high walls, no doubt, was the amount of stone on the properties. But the 'demand' side may also have contributed. This was a period when dairying was transforming from a cottage to an export industry: the quality of the soil, or the rainfall, might have made this investment in the land worthwhile at this time, whereas it did not in Melton Shire. This is clearly very speculative, but perhaps demonstrates a need for more general research on the relationship between economics of farming and fence construction.

8   Parish Plan, Parish of Derrimut

Road were purchased by individuals, a few (eg William Doherty) of whom were *bona fide* farmers, while others (eg James Watson and William Craig) purchased multiple allotments, numerous of which appear to have been subject to speculative subdivision. South of these precincts the northern pattern was repeated, with WJT Clarke purchasing many allotments (although not as many as he did to the north); their price was probably lower than those on Boundary Road where speculators were operating.

• **The Establishment of a Farming Community**

The 1854 sales of Crown Lands in relatively small 100 acre parcels enabled the establishment of small farms. On allotments along Boundary Road, between Middle Road (originally in the Shire of Braybrook but in Melton Shire since the early twentieth century) and Doherty's Road (in the Shire of Wyndham), and significantly isolated by large pastoral estates, communities of *bona fide* farmers established small hamlets such as Mount Cottrell and South Derrimut (later known as Tarneit, and Truganina).

Melton Shire is a very dry place. The 'Melton Mallee' woodland near the Djerriwarrh Creek is the only place where mallee vegetation is found south of the Dividing Range.[9] The area from about Bacchus Marsh - Diggers Rest to the Bay and towards Geelong has the lowest average rainfall in the Port Phillip district, about 22 inches (56 cm). The area between Melton and Werribee – which includes the Mount Atkinson Precinct – has the lowest rainfall of all, less than 18 inches (46 cm).[10] Places associated with the provision of domestic and stock water supply are therefore of particular significance.

In the early 1930s, octogenarian Robert D Hopkins, born in 1854, related the two fundamental problems of early farmers. 'Two of the original difficulties' he said 'were in connection with water supply and transport.' For a time the necessary water was carried from Werribee River 'but only until such time as wells could be sunk, and dams used for water conservation'. As with the rest of the Shire however, it is likely that recourse would have had to have been made to the river in times of water shortage. 'Of course years passed before there were any metal roads', continued Hopkins, 'and horses ranged in

price from £120 to £140 per head. Consequently the bullock occupied pride of place for purposes of traction on the road or in the field.'[11]

In nearby Truganina (a little to the west) a bluestone Methodist church was built on the left bank of Skeleton Creek, on the south side of Boundary Road, in the 1850s. Then Sam Evans gave a quarter of an acre of land on the north-east corner of the intersection of Doherty's and Skeleton Creek Roads, for a corrugated iron Baptist church, built 1862. Members of the Baptist community included the locally prominent Cropley brothers. John Cropley often travelled across the country from Rockbank to take services as a lay preacher. Once a month Rev William Wade drove from Footscray on Saturday, preached at the church on Sunday, and returned to Footscray on Monday. An 1871 Sunday School roll names 37 children from 13 families.[12]

In the 1860s the Education Department inspector described the Mt Cottrell farmers as 'well-to-do', and the Rockbank familes as being 'in fair circumstances'. The 'farmers and dairy keepers' of Mt Atkinson however were described as being 'in very moderate circumstances'.[13] With the wretched seasons, droughts and pests of the early 1860s, many farmers left the area. By 1871 a 'group of twelve farmers and one labourer were the only landholders in south Derrimut'. The departure of the Cropley brothers and others from the district meant dwindling support for Baptist church, which was purchased in 1907 by the Werribee Presbyterian church, and used by a number of other Protestant churches.[14]

The farmers of the area 'were separated by their neighbours to the north by thousands of acres of the Clarke *Rockbank* Estate, but linked to their western neighbours by Boundary Road.'[15] During the 1860s many of the surveyed roads on the square-mile grid on the southern plains had been closed, incorporated into the immense *Rockbank* estate. In 1871 the only open roads in the district are said to have been Boundary Road, Greigs Road, Mt Cottrell Road, and Mt Atkinson

9   National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Landscape Classification Report. Also *Ballarat Courier*, 11/6/1983
10   Peel, L, *Rural Industry in the Port Phillip Region, 1835-1880* (MUP, Melbourne, 1974), p.9

11   George F Green, 'A History of Truganina', unpublished typescript, 1935, pp.2-3
12   Starr, J, *Melton: Plains of Promise*, Shire of Melton, nd, pp.171-172
13   Ford, Owen, 'Voices From Below: Family, School and Community in the Braybrook Plains 1854-1892' (M.Ed Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1993), pp.215, 235
14   Green, *op cit*, p.4. Pages 177-200 of the 'Rural Heritage Study: Western Region of Melbourne' (Melbourne Western Region Inc) by Chris Johnston / Context provides an overview of heritage places of this district.
15   Ford, *op cit*, p.234

Road (perhaps included at the urging of speculator TH Jones, who had subdivided a village half-way along this road).[16] Notably, Hopkins Road is not included in this list; named after the Hopkins family several generations of whom were represented on the Braybrook Shire Council, it may have been opened after the 1878 Royal Commission into Closed Roads, which recommended the cessation of the practice of closing roads. The opening of Hopkins Road would have made Mt Atkinson Road, on which no small farm had been established, superfluous, and in c.1887 Patrick Killeen blocked it off with a stone wall across Boundary Road, effectively incorporating the road reservation into his own farm.[17]

In contrast to the Clarke estate which formed a barrier to the north, the east-west links were open for the farmers. In his evidence to the 1878 Royal Commission, Wyndham Shire Secretary and Engineer Patrick Nolan identified the 'three or four leading thoroughfares in the Shire of Wyndham' as Doherty's Road (parallel to and south of Boundary Road), Sayers Road (near Werribee), and Boundary Road, which he described as 'pretty well made'.[18]

- **The Gold Era Subdivisions**

An interesting historical sub-theme of the precinct was the small-allotment re-subdivision of land along prospective routes to the Ballarat gold-fields by gold-rush era speculators. Although the main route between Melbourne and Ballarat was the present Melton Highway through Keilor, the Western Highway and Greigs Road were lesser routes and Boundary Road, Middle Road and Doherty's Road apparently also carried some traffic.

When prices of land soared during the early 1850s, speculators snapped up Crown Lands on the flat, treeless, dry, isolated and shallow-soiled Melton-Werribee plains. They were particularly busy in the parishes of Pywheitjorrk and Derrimut. Travelling on the badly marked road from Geelong to Melbourne in 1854, William Westgarth encountered only 7 people (most near Melbourne), but was glad to see the plains in the process of survey. While hoping that men of modest financial means would be able to acquire it,

he remained sceptical:- 'Already the speculators are pouncing upon it – buying it all up as fast as it is sold, and letting it lie in hope of an augmented price.'[19]

But many of the speculators were not content to let their blocks lie, instead conjuring up audacious schemes to expedite and inflate their returns. The present day Boundary and Greigs Roads, and the Western Highway, as minor alternative routes between Melbourne and Ballarat, inspired the boosters to subdivide villages along them, creating so-called townships such as 'Middleton', 'Staughtonville', and 'North Uxbridge'. One township of about 120 suburban-sized allotments was even created half-way along Mount Atkinson Road.[20] Scores of allotments, of size ranging from less than half an acre to five acres (2 hectares), were created in these subdivisions.

If, as some proposed, the intention of the subdivisions was to facilitate the establishment of small yeoman farmers, they proved utter failures. No evidence of actual development, and only the barest fragments of their histories, remain today. It is highly likely in fact that many purchasers of the small rural and township blocks so created were themselves aspiring speculators. Most probably bought their properties on the strength of the representation of the 'developer', without having bothered to actually visit the properties. The boom appears to have amplified each whisper from every plausible source into an urgent din that many urban professionals and small businessmen found difficult to resist.

Crown Allotment 2 of Section One (the Hopkins homestead allotment) and CA 6 of Section One, and CAs 3 and 4 of Section Two, Parish of Derrimut, appear to have been subdivided by 1850s speculators. A later surveyors plan showed a patchwork of allotments, some with roads, on these allotments that are clearly the remnant of an earlier subdivision.[21] There is also evidence that CA 3 of Section 2 (at least) was associated with the serial speculator/subdivider Joseph Charles Clinchy, of 'Melbourne Gentleman'. This allotment was one of at least three c.100 acre allotments which had

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16 Ford, *op cit*, p.236, 239

17 PROV VPRS 460/P36721, statutory declaration by Samuel Smith, March 1907; and Lands Victoria, Torrens Application 36721, 'Plan of Crown Portions 1 & 3, Parish of Derrimut, 28/9/1905'.

18 Royal Commission into Closed Roads, Progress Report (containing minutes of evidence etc), Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1878 (No.72), p.13

19 Cited in John Lack & Olwen Ford, 'Melbourne's Western Region: An Introductory History' (Melbourne's Living Museum of the West, Melbourne Western Region Commission, 1986), p.30

20 Lands Victoria, Torrens Application 15850 (Crown Allotment 6, Section 15, Parish of Pywheitjorrk).

21 Lands Victoria, Torrens Application 31642, Claude Purchas 28/5/1898; a version of this plan is also attached to the title created by the application.

been purchased from the Crown by William Byrne, 'Melbourne Civil Engineer' and sold to Clinchy. While two of these Byrne allotments were on or near Boundary Road, a larger subdivision, 'better known as the Village of Surrey', was 'on the road to Buninyong', on the south side of the Western Highway, opposite Clarkes Road. As was typical, it was soon subsumed into the Rockbank estate.[22]

At least 17 small allotments and two roads are known to have been created by Clinchy in the Mt Atkinsion Precinct, on land newly purchased from the Crown by W Byrne and J Fox. As these allotments were approximately 4 acres each, and the original allotments some 200 acres, it is likely that many more were created. Having already purchased numerous of these small allotments, in 1898 Robert Faragher claimed much of the balance of CA3 and CA4 of Section 2 by adverse possession; some 12 names were identified as having a potential interest in the land.[23]

Another major partnership in gold-rush speculation in Melton Shire comprised Algernon Lindsay, 'victualler', and James Moxham, 'auctioneer', both of Williamstown. They had jointly subdivided part of Section 24 Parish of Derrimut (the land immediately to the east of the present Hopkins Road overpass, on the south side of the Western Highway) into at least 58 allotments of 5 acres, selling them for up to £26 each. [24] Most purchasers (fellow Williamstown-ites) purchased multiple blocks, probably site unseen, and virtually all had on-sold to WJT Clarke within 3 or 4 years, usually at about half the price they had paid, although some received even less. The Lindsay/ Moxham team also subdivided an allotment in the Mt Atkinson Precinct:- CA3, Section 1, Parish of Derrimut, on the east side of Mt Atkinson Road. The allotment had been purchased from the Crown by J Moxham in 1854, and in 1864 Algernon Lindsay conveyed some 46 allotments, on 'Lindsay', 'Mason' and 'Southgate' streets, to Patrick Killeen. These were likely the unwanted allotments from the goldrush subdivision. In 1904 Patrick Killeen's son Thomas, seeking creation of a title for his farm, claimed other parts of this property by adverse possession. His solicitors had identified 11 persons who might have had an interest in parts of the land.[25]

There is also evidence that CA1 Section 1, the 100 acre allotment immediately north purchased from the Crown by WS Durie (who had also purchased the Rocklands homestead allotment for which there is also evidence of speculative subdivision), had also been subdivided into small allotments. In the period 1860s – 1880s Patrick Killeen had purchased portions of this Allotment from different owners.

Such speculative subdivisions in the Mt Atkinson Precinct would have been abandoned by the late 1850s, as soon as the major gold-rushes ended. Many of the unwanted small blocks appear to have been incorporated into the adjacent dairy farms, at a low price, or for no price where owners had simply walked away from their purchases. Some small farmers (such as the Killeens) may even have been initially attracted to the district because of the possibility of establishing very small farms on subdivided portions of the original 100 acre Crown Allotments. During the nineteenth century most of land in the Mt Atkinson Precinct was in the ownership of the Hopkins and Faragher families. In addition, another 270 acres were owned by the Killeens, and a 100 acre block was owned by the Clarkes.[26] The Woods family lived on a small property in the precinct on land rented from Clarke and Hopkins.

• **The Hopkins Property, Rocklands**

William Hopkins married Catherine Currie in Kilmarnock, Scotland on 2nd June 1851, after which the couple sailed for Australia, arriving at Gawler (South Australia) later in the year.[27] The extended family then moved around different parts of Victoria and Tasmania. One cousin settled in Sale, a second (after whom the Hopkins River is thought to have been named) went to Warrnambool, while cousin Robert moved to Boundary Road. In 1856 William and Catherine brought their young family to the property on which the homestead is built (part of of Crown Allotment 2, Section 1, Parish of Derrimut, which had been purchased from the Crown in May 1854 by WS Durie.[28]) William conducted a dairy farm.[29] The Hopkins' were the only Presbyterian family in the locality then known as 'Derrimut' – later Truganina – in which Weslyans, Episcopaleans, and Baptists predominated.

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22 PROV VPRS 460/P/35850 (Torrens Application 35850), conveyance, 17/8/1863.

23 PROV VPRS 460/P/31642 (Torrens Application 31642), various conveyances.

24 VPRS 460/P/35850 (Torrens Application 35850), various indentures.

25 PROV VPRS 460/P/36721 (Torrens Application 36721), various indentures.

26 Shire Map Series (1892): Parish of Derrimut

27 Unless otherwise stated, Hopkins family history is derived from pesonal conversations with Mrs Wendy Bitans, 13/2/2002, 14/3/2002.

28 Parish Plan, Parish of Derrimut

29 Sutherland, A. *Victoria and Its Metropolis*, (McKarron Bird, Melbourne, 1888), p.427

It was a pocket of smaller holdings isolated from Rockbank in the north by WJT Clarke's vast *Rockbank* estate, further to the north-east lay Morton and Leech's *Mount Derrimut* station. It was connected to the west and east by Boundary Road.[30]

School records show that in 1866 the Hopkins' had five children enrolled in the local school: William, aged 13 (born in Adelaide); Robert, aged 11 (born in South Melbourne's 'Canvass Town'); Margaret, aged 8, Elizabeth, aged 6, and Catherine, aged 3. As with many local communities in the early days, the Derrimut community was in dispute about the best location for the local school, with the different camps lodging hand-drawn maps of the location of dwellings of children who attended the school. The school committee was split, with four members representing the southern interests, and five representing families in the Parish of Derrimut. William Hopkins was in the camp of the latter. The dispute escalated dramatically when the Hopkins camp moved the school to their preferred site (rather than the site selected in Truganina by the southern interests) in the middle of the night. The southern camp was furious, describing the the settled Weslyan and Episcopalean families of Derrimut as ruffians. A correspondent complained particularly of the behaviour of William Hopkins at a meeting. He had 'interrupted the proceedings in a most violent manner, using towards your correspondent the most vile and filthy language as could not be repeated'. Receiving no support from the chairman, the complainant left the meeting. By 1871 the vocal Hopkins was a Councillor of the Shire of Braybrook.[31]

The 1860s marked a turning point for farming in the Melton district, with many small farmers failing and leaving from this time. The boom prices of the gold-rush had collapsed, the good early yields had quickly exhausted the poor soils, and the crops were infested with rust and caterpillars, and decimated by drought. The advent of pleuro-pneumonia in cattle was devastating for those who relied on dairy produce. And wheat was now imported into Melbourne, both from overseas and from the new lands being opened in northern Victoria. The peak acreage under crop in the district from Bacchus Marsh to Craigieburn (including Melton), occurred in 1859. This figure was halved by

1864, and a further slight decline occurred during the next two decades.[32]

The report of the West Bourke agricultural inspector in 1862-63 noted the continued drought, and the advent of 'that dreadful disease, pluero-pneumonia.' This had ruined some industrious families, and was causing many dairymen to turn their attention to sheep dealing.[33] Memories of Melton Shire farmers John Chandler and Anders Hjorth both record the loss of heifers on local farmers commons (usually just unalienated crown land) to pleuro-pneumonia.[34] While in 1863-64 pleuro-pneumonia was no so virulent according to the inspector, he noted that he had recently 'met a gentleman from Derrimut who informed me that he had lost 27 of his best milkers' to the disease.[35] The disease was a major incentive to farmers to build good walls. Grain cropping farmers were devastated by 'rust and the caterpillar' in the 1863-64 season.[36]

The exceptional drought continued through the 1865-66 season: '… most disastrously felt over the whole line of the plain country, extending from Essendon to the Djerriwarrh Creek.' There was still the occasional loss of cattle in the district to pleuro-pneumonia. The hoped-for advantages of the 'commonages' to dairy farmers had been disappointed, as they were always overstocked during the growing months, and in drought the 'wretched cattle' must die of starvation, said the agricultural inspector.[37] In the Truganina - Derrimut area, which has the lowest average annual rainfall in the Port Phillip district (18 inches), only 11 inches of rain fell in each of the years 1867 and 1868.[38]

The drought of the 1860s caused the failure of many small settlers, and the merging of their quarter square mile properties into larger holdings.[39] Olwen Ford's detailed study of the South Derrimut district shows that

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30   Ford, Olwen, 'Voices From Below: Family, School and Community in the Braybrook Plains 1854-1892' (M.Ed Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1993), pp.222, 234

31   Ford, *op cit*, pp.222, 230

32   Peel, L, *Rural Industry in the Port Phillip Region, 1835-1880,* (MUP, 1974), p.90.

33   Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1864, p.94

34   Chandler, J (M Cannon), *Forty Years in the Wilderness* (Loch Haven, Arthurs Seat, 1990), p.175; 'Recollections of Melton 1861-67', by Anders Hjorth, reproduced in the MDHS News Sheet, April 2001

35   Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1864-65, Vol.3, p.93.

36   *ibid* The dry lands that were soon to be opened for selection on the lower Goulburn and the Wimmera were not affected by rust, and consequently wheat growing soon moved north from the 1850s farming areas such as Port Phillip and Kyneton.

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

38   Green, *op cit*, pp.3-4, 7

39   *ibid*

in 1866 there had been 40 families with schoolchildren in the district. Six families were lost to the district in 1868-69, and by 1871 there were only twelve farming families, and one labourer, with children in the school.[40]

William Hopkins continued to add acreage to his farm. By the early 1870s he had increased his holding to 387 acres of land, described as being situated in a 'peculiar manner, that is to say, in various blocks and not those adjoining each other.' Three of the blocks were situated amongst WJT Clarke's holdings.[41] By the 1880s, under the management of William Hopkins junior and his brother Robert, dairying had been replaced by hay growing and grazing.[42] The combination of hay and sheep was one of the movements in local farming in the late nineteenth century.[43] Although dairying would also make a general revival at a later stage, the pleuro-pneumonia outbreak of the late 1860s could be expected to have contributed to the shift at the Hopkins' farm. Indian horse-dealers were also good buyers of the district's hay at that time.[44] In the early twentieth 'general farming and grazing' were being conducted on the property.[45]

The family was immersed in the 'South Derrimut' - 'Truganina' community. William junior married a Missen (the large pioneering Rockbank family who had also come over from South Australia), as did several of his sisters. His brother Robert Duncan Hopkins married a Miller (of Millers Road Altona); it was Robert who inherited the homestead property. In the early 1880s elder brother William, a justice of the peace, followed his father's footsteps in being elected a member of the Braybrook Shire Council in 1882, and President in 1887.[46] Robert Duncan Hopkins, who obtained possession of the Rocklands property, also followed his father in being both a member of the school Board of Advice, and a Councillor of the Shire of Braybrook; he was President of the Shire at the time of Federation.[47]

The family is well represented in historical photographs of Truganina annual picnics. Local records show Robert Hopkins as runner-up in both the 'Slow Bicycle Race', and Obstacle Race held at the Truganina Debating

Society's 1904 picnic. R Hopkins, with JP Robinson, was elected first President of the Truganina Progress Association in 1924. In 1926 he was appointed a Trustee of the new Truganina recreation ground. In 1933, at a ball held to mark the Silver Anniversary of the opening of the Truganina Hall (Mechanics Hall), Robert Hopkins was presented with an illuminated address as a token of appreciation of his 25 years as Secretary to the Hall committee. With Henry Robinson, Robert Hopkins also initiated the Truganina tradition of the 'Ladies Night', in which men provided entertainment and catering as a gesture of thanks for the work of the local women at all public functions in the area.[48] Robert had the first tractor in the district.

In January 1969, on the same day the (separate) Lara fire killed five people, a fire started on Boundary Road and quickly burnt east and south. Many of the local fire brigade out fighting the Lara fire returned to find their own houses burnt. Forty five houses were destroyed by the 'Truganina' fire that day, as well as the Truganina school and hall.[49] While the stone house of their neighbour to the west was lost to the fire, and Tibbermore, the nearby house on their south side, was charred, Rocklands survived.[50]

The exact date of the present bluestone house is unknown to the family, but is thought to be early. Family history is that the first house was of wattle and daub. William brought a stonemason from Scotland to build the house (his second job was a house on nearby Doherty's Road). In 1881 the house was described as a bluestone house of four rooms with wooden stables.[51] In the 1930s Robert D Hopkins, who was born in 1854, remembered a hotel (or shanty) that had been built opposite the Hopkins' farm to cater for goldfields traffic along Middle Road.[52] Hopkins family lore is that

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40   Ford, *op cit*, pp.223, 225, 234
41   Ford, *op cit*, p.222, citing William Hopkins' 1881 probate papers. He had also acquired 114 acres in the Parish of Truganina.
42   Sutherland, *loc cit*
43   Sutherland, *op cit*, p.419-439
44   Green, GF, 'A History of Truganina' (1935), p.4
45   Albert Evans, 'From the Early Settlers to the 1969 Fires' (unpublished manuscript), p.5
46   Sutherland, *op cit,* p.427
47   Evans, *loc cit*; Bitans, *op cit*, 13/2/2002; Green, *op cit*, p.7

48   Green, *op cit*, pp.10-14
49   Bitans, *op cit*
50   Evans, *op cit*, p.5 ; The overgrown ruins of the stone house to the west survive. It was owned by Patrick and Mary Anne Killen and family from at least c.1870 to 1890s, and then Bob Patterson; there are memories of the Hopkins' family visiting the Pattersons to play cards (Shire Map Series, 1892, Parish of Derrimut; Ford, *op cit*, p.233
51   Ford, *op cit*, p.222, citing probate papers.
52   Green, *op cit*, p.2. It is possible that Middle Road was one of the many informal routes taken in the early goldrush days before official roads (tracks) were properly formed. It would have provided a route from the west of Melbourne (including the Footscray and Williamstown areas) away from the swampy Western Highway route which was not in common use until several decades later. Wendy Bitans recounts local lore that there are two graves dating to the goldrush days beside the

stone for the Rocklands house was taken from this shanty. If this is so, better quality quarried stone was probably also obtained from elsewhere for dressing by the stonemason. The archaeological remains of the hotel (several depressions, with evidence of stone foundations and stairs, in which crockery and other artefacts have been found, and cobble paving) are situated in a paddock on the opposite side of Hopkins Road, on a property which is thought to have been owned by the Hopkins family since the early 1850s.

The Derrimut-Truganina plain is the driest place in the Port Phillip region. Until such time as underground tanks and dams could be sunk, the residents of the Truganina area had to carry water from the Werribee River.[53] It could reasonably be assumed that it was very early in his occupation that Hopkins built the small dam near the homestead, located to take advantage of a shallow drainage line which crosses in front of the property (Wall B44). It is an extremely good expression of the necessity for farmers to harvest water in the plains area. It is also an excellent example of the shallow dams built in the plains areas, where the shallow soil (high bedrock) generally prevented deep excavation for paddock tanks, and so fieldstone was used to build up walls on shallow drainage lines. It is c.3 metres deep, which would appear to be deeper than the typical early small dry-stone wall dams in the district. Its quality of construction, and depth, may have played a part in the success of the Hopkins farm at times when many neighbours were failing.

This dam appears very similar to the description and plan of a 'pond' provided in an 1857 edition of a British encyclopaedia, a variant of the conventional English paved stock pond:-

> *'It consists in employing the horse-shoe form as the ground plan of the excavation, and cutting all the sides steep, or at an angle of 45 or 50 degrees, except the part answering to the heel of the shoe, which is well gravelled or paved, as the only entrance for the cattle. The excavated earth serves to raise the high side of the pond, which is generally guarded by a fence, or a few trees.'* [54]

The Hopkins dam varies only in the addition of dry stone walling for the steep sides of the construction.

The farm is also notable for its complex of dry stone walls, as stockyards and paddock walls. The present owner is Wendys Bitans, a direct descendant of the original owner, William Hopkins. She advises that the walls were substantially altered in the 1930s Depression, when her father allowed many to be taken apart by rabbiters facing starvation. They were afterwards rebuilt, but not with the professional skills of the originals.

- **The Faragher Property**

To the south of and adjoining the Hopkins' property were the homes of the two Faragher families. Daniel and Robert H Faragher had purchased the site of the present Tibbermore homestead from J Begg in 1855, just one year after Begg had purchased it from the Crown. In 1859 they purchased C Smith's 100 acre Crown purchase on Middle Road. Additional allotments were purchased over the following decades.[55]

In the 1860s Robert and Elizabeth Faragher had four children of school age, as did Daniel and his wife Christina. Daniel Faragher, the eldest brother, was a member of the Braybrook Road District Board. The Faraghers were Weslyans; Robert was Chapel Steward of the Weslyan chapel at Skeleton Creek and the donor of half an acre of land proposed for a new school site.[56]

The brothers ran the farm as a partnership. Daniel died in 1868, and his wife Christina died in 1869, leaving five children (one had died in 1866). Daniel Faragher had been 'one of the of the more comfortably off families in the district', yet the list of his assets in his probate papers include what we would regard today as very small items, such as 30 milch dishes, two cream crocks, two buckets, a can and scales and weights.

It appears that after Daniel's death Robert took over the running of the whole farm, and possibly the guardianship of the children. The Daniel Faragher children attended Mount Cottrell school to the west, possibly with a 'certificate of destitution.'

By 1871 Rober Faragher was one of the larger landholders of the Braybrook Shire, his farm was being over 500 acres in extent (half held in trust for his brother's children). He was involved in Mount Cottrell school, and

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road, one near Hopkins Road, the other (a 12 year old girl) some 1.5 kilometres east. Their exact locations were known to the previous generation of locals.   Ruts were once visible in the road.

53   Green, *op cit*, p3.
54   Loudon, JC, *Encyclopaedia of Agriculture* (London, Brown Green Longman's & Roberts, 1857), p.735.

55   PROV VPRS 460/P/31642.
56   Ford, *op cit*, p.222

was one of the organisers of an annual picnic held for the people of Mt Cottrell and the plains. His son William was a school prize winner in 1874. The Faragher family were buried at Truganina Cemetery.[57]

In 1900 Robert Faragher (farmer 'of Tower Hill, Koroit') held title to 584 acres 3 roods and 1 perch of land in Sections 1 and 2 of the Parish of Derrimut. In 1902 this land was transferred to Moonee Ponds 'gentleman' Finlay McPhail, who sold it in 1906 to 'Derrimut Grazier' John Walter Leigh.[58] The information of the current owner is that Faragher 'went back' to Kororoit around 1900. Like all local farmers, he made money at the time by growing oats for Boer War horses. The Leighs built the 'extension' to the house. This was probably the current weatherboard house (with pressed metal ceilings), behind which is a bluestone addition which is believed to have been constructed with stone from the original Faragher house (the large underground tank being the only part of the original house which now survives).[59]

By 1934 that part of the property to the east of Hopkins Road (202 acres, 2 roods, 31 perches) was on a separate title, in the ownership of Harold Knowles. In 1941 William Athol Boyd was the owner. In 1950 and 1951 the property changed hands several times, but in 1952 was purchased by Alexander Graham McNaughton, whose descendents still own this and adjacent properties.[60] The McNaughtons have thus owned the property and maintained its dry stone walls longer than any other owner.
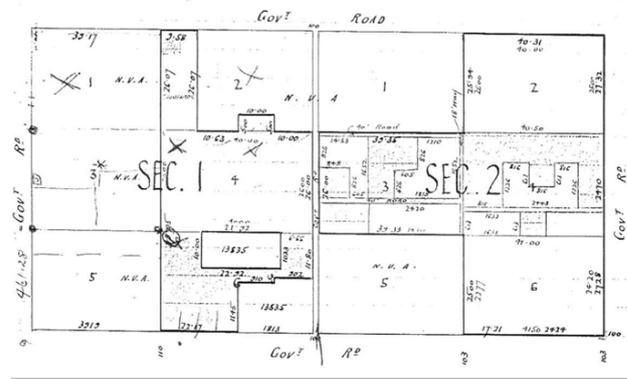
Old local resident Albert Evans' late twentieth century notes on the district have it that the Faragher family 'all died at an early age', that Bill Hannan and then Bill Boyd farmed the property for a number of years before it was sold to McNaughton.[61]

In about 1960 a major theft occurred of stone from one of the walls of the Tibbermore property. The house had a close escape from the devastating 1969 fire, its bullnoze verandah being lost.

It is evident from the sketch plan attached to the original title that the property had originally been subdivided into small allotments by early speculators. It was no doubt one of these sites that is today known as the 'shanty site'.[62]

A surveyors plan of Robert Faragher's land in 1900 shows a roughly 'H' shaped property with Hopkins Road crossing vertically through the centre. It is evident that Crown Allotments 2, 4 and 6 of Section One, and CAs 3 and 4 of Section Two have been previously subdivided into many smaller parcels, some of which have been amalgamated. Section Two shows two of the roads created in the early subdivision, but apparently never actually used. (Courtesy of Mrs Bonnie McNaughton.)

- **The Killeen Property**

To the west of McNaughtons' Tibbermore, to the east of Mt Atkinson Road, is a low ruin of a stone cottage that was built by the Killeens, and nearby an associated dam and windmill. The house was destroyed in the 1969 fire.[63]

In 1864 Patrick Killeen, of Kildare, Ireland, purchased 46 of the unwanted small lots created by speculators A Lindsay and J Moxham in the mid 1850s. Patrick and Mary Ann Killeens' daughter Catherine was born on the property in 1868. They progressively added to their landholding, purchasing additional allotments over ensuing decades.[64]

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57   Ford, *op cit*, pp.230-232

58   Certificate of Title, Vol.2770 Fol.553853. (Thanks to Bonnie McNaughton for copy of this title).

59   Bonnie McNaughton, personal conversation, 26/2/2002

60   Certificate of Title, Vol.5896 Fol.1179073

61   Albert Evans, notes ('From the Early Settlers to the 1969 Fires'), Site 45.

62   Personal conversation, Bonnie and Robert McNaughton, 26/2/2002

63   Evans, *op cit*, Site No.44.

64   PROV VPRS 460/P/36721, conveyances and statutory declarations.

In 1870 the Killeens' farm was 170 acres. They were still a young couple when their three week old daughter Mary Jane died in 1870. Mary Anne told the coroner she took her down to their 'next neighbour' Mrs Woods 'who is of more experience about children than I am'.[65] (Two of the Woods children were later to die of the diphtheria that scourged the district in the in 1870s. The Woods also lived within the precinct.[66]) Four Killeen children died under the age of 6 years.[67]

In 1872 Patrick Killeen and neighbouring farmers John Scott, his nephew William, and William Palmer, were driving drays home from a bone mill at Melton with 1.5 tons of bone dust. They stopped for a drink at the Rose and Crown Hotel in Rockbank, after which Scott stumbled and fell under the wheel of his dray, which killed him. While denying that Scott was drunk, Killeen conceded to the coroner that 'I believe the deceased was in the custom of taking a good deal of liquor. We used to have a drop together sometimes.'[68]

Mary Anne Killeen died in 1884 and her daughter Rachel died in 1889. Patrick died from an accident in 1898, and in the early years of the next century his son Thomas succeeded to the family farm. The property was leased to the Patterson family, who milked cows up until 1939; after the war Colin Morton's brother purchased it.[69]

- **The Rockbank Estate**

Like most farming precincts in Melton Shire situated east of Toolern Creek, the Hopkins, Faragher and Killeen farms were almost surrounded by the Clarke family's immense Rockbank pastoral estate. Clarke owned the abutting land to the west, north, and east of the Mt Atkinson Precinct.[70] The western and northern perimeter walls of the precinct are Rockbank boundary walls.

WJT 'Big' Clarke, whose early 1850s Sunbury Special Survey coup saw him gain control of most of the stations of earlier squatters in the whole region from Diggers Rest to Konagaderra, set about adding to this estate at the 1850s Crown land sales in the Shires of Melton and Wyndham. He was later described as the

largest landholder in Australia. Clarke apportioned this 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.

Over the next 30-40 years Clarke and his son WJ Clarke (later to become Australia's first baronet) added greatly to their estate by buying adjacent properties, many of which had been abandoned by impoverished farmers during times of droughts or agricultural disease. Upon Big Clarke's death in 1874 WJ Clarke 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 the Hume Highway.[71] By 1892 Sir WJ Clarke owned the vast majority of the Parish of Pywheitjorrk, which together with his similarly extensive Parish of Derrimut landholdings, comprised most of the southern part of his immense *Rockbank* estate.[72]

71   Peel, *op.cit.*, pp.130-1; Michael Clarke, *'Big' Clarke* (Queensberry Hill Press, Melbourne, 1980) Clarke (1980), opposite p.247
72   SLV Map 821.1A (1892), Parish of Pywheitjorrk; also PROV VPRS 460/P0 (35850).

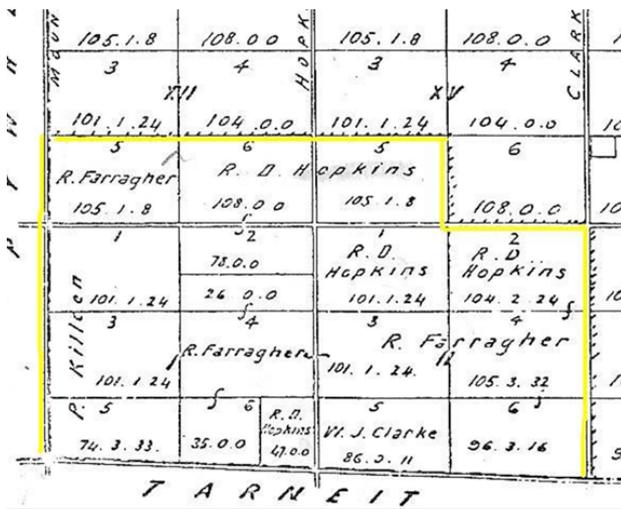65   Ford, *op cit*, pp.233-234
66   Ford, *op cit*, p.241
67   PROV VPRS 460/P/36721, conveyances and statutory declarations.
68   Ford, op cit, pp.224-225
69   Evans, *loc cit*
70   Shire Map Series (1892), Parishes of Derrimut and Pywheitjorrk.

Part of Parish of Derrimut, 1892, showing the boundary of the Clarke Rockbank estate (hatched in original and highlighted here in yellow) surrounding the farming district on three sides. The western and most of the northern parts of this boundary wall survive. The farming area of Truganina/Tarneit continues on into the Parish of Tarneit (in the Shire of Wyndham). The centre of the image is junction of Hopkins Road (north south) and Middle Road (east west), the west part of which is closed.

However, by the end of the nineteenth century historical changes were afoot. In addition to new taxes and the inherent difficulties of the pastoral industry, a new generation of farmers was restlessly surveying the vast pastoral estates about them. In the 1860s local Melton farmer Anders Hjorth had observed that 'the village was surrounded by large pastoral estates on three sides.'[73] There had long been a belief in Melton that these estates were thwarting the development of the town. As early as 1883 the situation enraged 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 …'[74]

As the the 1890s depression deepened popular discontent intensified, 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.

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 Babcok 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.[75]

And so the beginning of the twentieth century marked a watershed in the history of Melton Shire. In 1898 surveyors on behalf of Sir RTH Clarke began their calculations of the bearings and lengths and fences of the estate, in preparation for its sale.[76]

The Dry Stone Walls

• **Dry Stone Walls on the Hopkins & former Faragher Properties**

Most of the walls in the precinct appear to have been built by the Hopkins family, whose Rocklands homestead is the centrepiece of the precinct, and the adjacent Faragher family. As a consequence of the goldrush subdivisions, some of the Hopkins and Faragher lands were in small parcels, and there was some swapping of these between the two neighbours, adding to the uncertainty about who built some of the walls.[77]

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73 Hjorth, *op cit*. Also, MDHS (1905 Melton Express), *op cit*, which refers to these three stations, plus Taylor's *Overnewton* Estate.
74 Cited in Lack, Ford, *op cit*, p.32

75 Dingle, *op cit*, p 193.
76 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 560/P0, 35850); also CT Vol.3211 Fol.642206, pertaining to an 8000 acre portion south part of this estate; and also Shire of Melton Ratebooks from 1905-06 which record local farmers as owners of parts of the *Rockbank* estate.)
77 Wendy Bitans, personal conversations, 13/2/2002, 14/3/2002;

In the early 1930s Robert D Hopkins recalled a 'hotel or "sly grog shop" opposite his residence', the ruined cellar of which could still be seen. The stone foundations and remains of this shanty or hotel cellar are still visible, set amongst dry stone walls.[78]
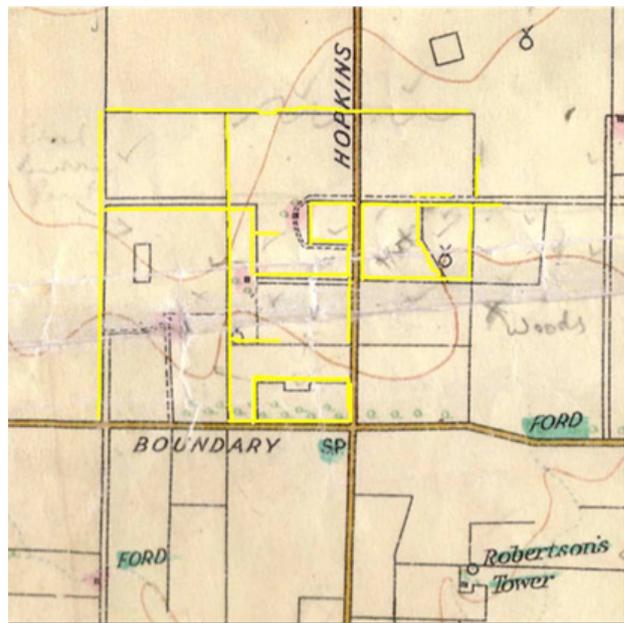
The map below shows the walls that were situated in the precinct in 1916, with walls extant in 2006 marked in yellow. The walls would have been built by the original Hopkins and Faragher families, and are likely to date from the late 1850s to the 1870s.

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also PROV VPRS 460/P/31642, Deed of Agreement 'to exchange lands Robert D Hopkins to Applicant' (1898).

78   Green, *op cit*, p.2; Bitans, *op cit*.

Part of 1916 Ordnance Map, showing the location of walls, which mark:- road boundaries; the internal boundaries of the c.100 acre allotments into which the land was surveyed and sold by the government; and also numerous smaller parcels some of which were the product of the even smaller allotments that were created by speculators in the mid -1850s gold-inspired property boom.

The Mt Atkinson Dry Stone Walls Precinct situated in the Shire of Melton, north of Boundary Road. The walls to the south of Boundary Road, in the former small farming district of Truganina/Tarneit in the adjacent Shire of Wyndham, are an integral part of the precinct. This small farming district was wedged between huge pastoral estates. The walls to the west and north of the precinct are the boundary walls of the Clarkes' Rockbank estate. The Mt Atkinson Precinct walls identified in this Study (the extant walls) are highlighted in yellow; it can be seen that these comprise the majority of the original walls (the walls south of Boundary Road were not included in this study).

Of the many walls in the precinct which are likely to have been associated with Hopkins and Faragher (the present Rocklands and Tibbermore properties), evidence from c.1900 surveyors plans associated with Torrens Applications by the parties suggests that:-

- Hopkins Road boundary Walls B127 and B139 and and Middle Road boundary Wall B140 were almost certainly built by Hopkins; although Hopkins Road may not have been opened until the 1870s or later, it is likely that the southern portion, which provided access to Hopkins and other farms, was opened early, and that these walls also date from the period late 1850s – 1860s.

- The complex of stockyards and walls on the Rocklands homestead site was obviously built by Hopkins; while some probably date to an early era, it is known that they were added to and rebuilt over time.

- The fine long north-south Wall B118 formed a property boundary between Faragher and Killeen and also Faragher and Hopkins, so is likely to have been built by Faragher, likely by the 1860s. This wall, known as the 'mile wall', was originally an all-stone wall which has been topped up with a few strands of wire; it is one of the most vertical and intact walls in the precinct.

- Walls B125/126 to the west of Hopkins Road, and Walls B38 and B42 on the east side of Hopkins Road were also Hopkins – Faragher boundary walls, the cost of which was likely shared, and which could have been built by either party. They were probably built in the late 1850s – early 1860s.

- Road boundary walls on the Faragher property – Walls B124 (Hopkins Road) and B119 (Boundary Road) – would have been erected by Faragher; they are likely to have been amongst the first walls they erected.

- One wall on Tibbermore that does not appear on surveyors Jenkins' 1898 plan is Wall B120. It was either built later or, being an internal wall, was simply not recorded in 1898.

No early surveyors' plans or descriptions of Wall B46 on Middle Road have been found. However it was the boundary to an allotment owned by RD Hopkins in the late nineteenth century, and may have been built by him.[1] It is of a style that is important in the Shire of Melton:- the composite 'half-walls' (apparently originally built in that form), some of which comprise a low stone wall, with just a few well-laid courses of stone and post & wire above. Wall B46 on Middle Road is probably the best stone wall of this type (in terms of condition and length) in Melton Shire.

As previously noted, Wall B44 (the dam in front of Rocklands) is a classic example of nineteenth century small farm dams adapted to the Melbourne's western plains. It is likely to have been one of the very early structures built by William Hopkins.

Many of the Hopkins walls were rebuilt in the 1930s as a consequence of the activities of rabbiters in the Depression.

The continuous occupation of Rocklands by the Hopkins family may have contributed to the preservation of the walls; similarly the Faragher property has been owned by the McNaughton family for a lengthy period.

- **Dry Stone Walls on the former Clarke Rockbank Estate**

The estates of the pastoralists – particularly the Clarkes, Staughtons, and Taylor – dominated Melton Shire in the nineteenth century. Of the 165 kilometres of dry stone walls identified in the Shire in this study, 73.7 kilometres, some 45%, appear to have been erected by the Clarkes' (WJT Clarke, Sir WJ Clarke, and Sir RTH Clarke) on the Rockbank estate. There are almost no drystone walls remaining that were associated with the Staughtons or William Taylor.

Little is known of when most of the Clarke walls were constructed.[2] Most of the information presently available constitutes the documents associated with RTH Clarke's applications for Torrens titles in preparation for selling the land in the early years of the twentieth century. In particular, statutory declarations attached to these applications (held at the PROV) sometimes describe the age and position of existing fences, and field notes for survey plans (held at Lands Victoria) often mark the walls and fences. Also, from the first edition of the Bacchus Marsh Express newspaper in 1866 until

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1   Shire Map Series (1892): Parish of Derrimut
2   Any Clarke family papers relating to the period might include such information in the form of account records, correspondence between managers and owners, maps, photographs etc. Such papers have not been located at this stage.

about 1890, there were periodic advertisements seeking stone wallers for specified lengths (miles) of walling. For example, in 1880 Clarke advertised for 'Stonewallers on Rockbank Station'; applicants were advised to apply at either the Raglan or Monmouthshire Hotels.[3] These advertisements – 'apply Monmouthshire Hotel Diggers Rest' or 'Rockbank Inn', or 'Rockbank Estate' – appear at regular intervals, together with warnings that trespassers pulling down walls would receive summary justice.[4] Although some walls are known to have been built later, it is likely that most stone walls on the Rockbank estate were built between the late 1850s and the early 1880s, after which period post and wire fencing would have been the major type of fencing built throughout area, as it was throughout the State.

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; 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.

The precinct contains a number of Rockbank boundary walls. Clarke probably arranged their construction.

Walls B115, B130 and B47 are portions of the same original east-west wall, c.2.3 kilometres in length, which comprised a southern boundary of the Clarke Rockbank estate. Wall B45 is a portion of a north-south wall near these walls.[5]

Wall G84 marks an eastern boundary of the Clarke Rockbank estate. Situated along the western side of the Mt Atkinson Road reservation, and stretching for 2.2 kilometres, it is the remnant of an original c.6.5 kilometre stone wall that stretched from Boundary Road to Greigs Road.[6] The fact that Mt Atkinson Road is

thought to have been one of only two (with Mt Cottrell Road) north-south roads in this southern portion of the Shire by 1871[7] suggests that Wall G84 is likely to have been one of the first walls constructed by Clarke. It would certainly pre-date 1871 and is likely to date to the late 1850s or early 1860s.

- **Dry Stone Walls on the former Killeen Property**

The fieldnotes and final plan of surveyor John S Jenkins made as part of Thomas Killeen's Torrens Title application show the fences on Crown Allotments 1, 3 and 5 of Section 1 Parish of Derrimut as they were in 1905.[8] They show these allotments, and the Mt Atkinson Road reserve to the west, entirely enclosed by 'stone walls'. On the west Mt Atkinson Road was walled along the whole length of its west side (Wall G84, a Rockbank boundary wall), and along the southern part of its east side (not extant). The northern wall (Wall B116) survives; it bordered a property owned by Faragher, and the cost was likely shared between the two parties. The long (c.1.9 kilometre) eastern wall, the boundary of the Hopkins and Faragher properties (Wall B118), also survives, substantial portions of it in excellent condition. The only external boundary wall that does not survive is the southern boundary, along Boundary Road.

Three east-west walls ran part-way into the allotments. These may have been built to accommodate small parcels created in the 1850s Lindsay/Moxham speculative subdivision. One is known to have been removed by Thomas Killeen in 1905.[9] A stone wall dam (Wall B117) survives in the locality of one of these walls. Another short north-south wall within the allotment has also been demolished.

It is certain then that these walls are over one hundred years old. It is likely that they were built sometime between the late 1850s and the 1870s, and that they are 130-150 years old.

It is interesting that, by 1905, Mt Atkinson Road, which had earlier been open, was now closed by stone walls (without gates) across it at both Boundary and Middle Roads.

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3   The Bacchus Marsh *Express*, 6/3/1880
4   Bilszta, 1990, *op cit*.
5   Lands Victoria, Torrens Application 35850 (p.18) 'Plan of Resurvey of Part of Parish of Derrimut', Claude Purchas, 23/2/1905
6   Lands Victoria, Torrens Application 35850 (p.3) 'Fieldnotes o fsurvey of Part of Parish of Pywheitjorrk', Claude Purchas, Dec 1904

7   Ford, *op cit*, p.236, 239
8   Lands Victoria, Torrens Application 36721
9   PROV VPRS 460/P/36721, statutory declaration by Samuel Smith, March 1907.

- **Dry Stone Walls Associated with the Gold Rush Subdivisions**

Some of the walls which survive (B121, B123, B170) would appear to correlate with the property boundaries established by the goldrush property speculators. The small size, and isolated location (even today), of these allotments provides telling evidence of the fantastic impact of 'gold fever' on society in the early to mid 1850s. Although they were almost certainly not built by the original purchasers of these allotments, but by later owners such as the Hopkins and Faragher families, they are now the only material evidence of the subdivision pattern established by speculators during the goldrush boom. They are the most graphic known evidence of the work of the speculators along gold-rush routes.

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

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

Comparable Places in Shire of Melton:

The comparable precincts of walls in the Shire of Melton are those situated around eruption points:- the Mount Cottrell Precinct; the Mount Kororoit Precinct; and the She-Oak Hill Precinct. It is also comparable, to a lesser extent, to the 'gateway' precincts, in particular the Greigs Road Precinct, the Western Highway Precinct, the Melton Highway Precinct, and the Robinsons Road Precinct.

Condition:

Overall, the walls in the precinct are in good condition.

Integrity:

The integrity of the walls in the precinct varies, from low, moderate to high. Some of the walls in the worst condition are located along the roads, where they are prey to to thieves who help themselves to stones for private gardens.

While the extent to which many dry stone walls have been altered over their long life may never be known, it is known that many of the walls on Hopkins' Rocklands

were reconstructed, in an inferior way to the originals, in the 1930s.

Recommendations:

Individual walls not already included in HO 114, are recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.

Other Recommendations:

- The walls in the precinct, especially the most significant examples, should be listed by the Shire of Melton as a high priority for future conservation works.

- An education campaign regarding the significance of the walls, and penalties for theft of stone, should be initiated by the Shire of Melton. This might include interpretation and other signage within the Precinct.

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

Wall B28.
Hopkins' Rocklands homestead garden wall.

Rocklands homestead landscape of stock-yard walls. (The shed at rear also has a stone wall.)

Wall 44.
Hopkins' stone-lined dam on Rocklands, showing paved stock access. Another wall in background. This dam is a textbook nineteenth century small farming dam.

Another small dam (dry), on former Killeen's property, south-west of Rocklands. Less elaborately constructed, without a cobbled ramp, this is a typical small farm dam in Melton Shire, on a small gully, dug about a metre or two to near the high bedrock, and walls constructed of fieldstone.

Walls B75.
At Rocklands homestead. A high and well constructed wall, with coping, is constructed using characteristic local round stones and the occasional boulder.

Walls B46.

Middle Road. This composite low stone post and wire fence with netting is the best preserved stone wall in the key 301 – 750 mm height range in the whole of Melton Shire. It is an excellent example of the major type of fence in the Shire that was constructed with a stone base. Although only a few stones high, its base is traditional double wall construction.

Walls B170. (Interior Rocklands paddock wall).

This style – with a broad-base and pyramidal rather than vertical shape –is the characteristic Melton wall. Steel droppers and barbed wire added later.

Wall B18.

The same style of wall, here more intact and vertical.

Walls B40.

(Both of the photos below). Middle Road. This is an excellent portion of a wall most of which is tumbling down (or having its stones stolen). Although doubtless repaired over its life, it demonstrates the original state of many local walls. The preservation of such remnants is important.

Walls B41.

Off Middle Road. Showing reasonably intact portion of original wall which has been topped up by single strand of barbed wire strung between later steel droppers.

Walls B42. (Off Middle Road).

Would appear to be an original composite 'half-wall, with early two-wire posts (with what may be remnants of thick 'black wire', now bypassed with barbed wire attached to post side).

Walls B48.

A similar wall/fence, with old four wire fence. Internal farm paddock wall, typically in better condition than roadside walls.

Walls B47. (Off Hopkins Road.

Clarke Rockbank Estate boundary wall.

Walls B39.

Wall on Hopkins Road, the major thoroughfare in the precinct.

Walls B122. Hopkins Road.

A portion of a major roadside wall that has not yet had stones pilfered.

Walls B118.

A more intact portion of the 'Mile Wall', an internal paddock wall behind Tibbermore. The wall runs north from Boundary to Middle Road.

Walls B43.

Looking west along Middle Road: a landscape of walls in the Mt Atkinson Precinct.