

No. 270: Staughton Infant Grave

Address	430-458 Exford Road, Weir Views
Significance	Local
Construction Date	1880
Period	Victorian
Date Inspected	May 2018



Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

The grave at 430-458 Exford Road, Weir Views, and its associated setting including the nearby copse of trees and the view to the valley of Toolern Creek to the east. The gravestone is comprised of a rectangular basalt base with a bevelled upper surface, surmounted by a remnant piece of white marble (likely to have originally been a cross) bearing a carved inscription – 'Died 11th October 1880 aged 9 months and 20 days'. The grave is almost certainly that of infant Rupert Werribee Staughton, the fourth child of Harry Werribee and Anna Maria Staughton who owned the Exford Estate.

How is it Significant?

The grave is of local historical, rarity and representative significance to the City of Melton.

Why is it Significant?

The grave is historically significant as one of a few, but nonetheless rare, isolated marked graves in the Municipality with its original gravestone and in its original location. It is also the only known infant grave. It has strong associations with the prominent Staughton family, and the grave site is located on land that until recently was associated with the Exford Estate. (Criteria A & B)

The small basalt and marble gravestone is of representative significance for being a partly intact and original example. The base, a small basalt plinth, remains intact however the marble component, likely to have been a cross, has been broken. (Criterion D)

Description

The gravestone is comprised of a rectangular basalt base with a bevelled upper surface, surmounted by a remnant piece of white marble (which presumably originally took the form of a cross).

The remnant marble bears the following carved inscription – 'Died 11th October 1880 aged 9 months and 20 days'. The name of the deceased was probably inscribed on the part that is now missing.

Currently the gravestone is covered with a metal drum to protect it.

The gravestone is located in the central part of the property, set in a small group of trees towards the edge of a ploughed area. It is near the edge of the plateau where the land falls away to the Toolern Creek. The Exford homestead is to the west and the Strathulloh homestead to the east.



View looking north from Greigs Road. The grave site is indicated.



Image dated c.2002, showing the grave at that time recessed in a small timber framed area. (Source: Shire of Melton Heritage Study, Stage 1)

History

The grave is almost certainly that of infant Rupert Werribee Staughton, who died 11 October 1880 aged 9 months and 20 days. Rupert, who was born in late December 1879, was the fourth child of Harry Werribee and Anna Maria Staughton. The grave site was part of the holdings long associated with the Exford estate. It is one of several marked (and probably also unmarked) isolated burial sites in the Municipality.

Harry Werribee Staughton was the youngest of seven children born to Simon Staughton (1797-1863) and Mary Susan (nee Dean, 1807-1893).¹ Simon and Mary, together with their eldest four children, immigrated to Victoria from England on the *Himalaya*, arriving in Port Melbourne in February 1842.² The family came from St Neot's and Great Staughton, Huntingdon County.³ Simon purchased the Exford run (then known as 'Brisbane Ranges and Exford') consisting of 60,000 acres in June 1842.⁴

¹ John F and H Peter W Staughton + Michael P Loader, *The Staughtons of Eynesbury*, 2003 pp40 + 98

² J F and H P W Staughton + M P Loader, *The Staughtons of Eynesbury*, pp40-42; 'Death of Mrs Armytage – Memories of Early Melbourne', *Argus*, 27 December 1924, p10

³ Sir Bernard Burke, *A genealogical and heraldic history of the colonial gentry*, 1891, p302 (from Ancestry.com website)

⁴ J F and H P W Staughton + M P Loader, *The Staughtons of Eynesbury*, p69

Harry Werribee Staughton was born at *Exford* in October 1848.⁵ In 1863, upon the death of his father, Harry inherited the Exford Estate which had by then been reduced to about 13,000 acres.⁶ He spent several years living in England, entering Cambridge University in 1868 and marrying Anna Maria Knight in London in 1870.⁷ In 1873 or 1874 Harry returned to Australia with Anna and their first child. Harry was twice Shire President of Melton Shire Council, in 1874-1875 and 1883-1884.⁸

Harry and Anna had seven children altogether: Florence (1873), Harold Werribee (1875), Phillip (1878), Rupert Werribee (1879), Edith Dora (1881), Lance Werribee (1884) and Reginald Werribee (1886).⁹ Harry and Anna suffered the loss of two of their children in infancy - Rupert in 1880, followed by their last child Reginald in 1887 aged 5 months and 4 days. Reginald was buried at the St Kilda cemetery (where his parents and two siblings would also later be buried).¹⁰ The other five children led long lives.

Death Registration

It was not until early 1853, with the proclamation of the *Registration (Births, Deaths and Marriages) Act*, that it was necessary to record details of a birth or death in Victoria. Subsequently these significant life events had to be registered with a local District Registrar.¹¹ Prior to this time, record keeping was incomplete and was largely reliant on the records of religious denominations however with the introduction in Britain during 1836 of legislation for civil registration of deaths, the Australian colonies gradually adopted this system.¹²

It has not been confirmed when the first registrar was appointed in the Melton District, though one was petitioned for during 1861. An early registrar was a Mr Corr, who was succeeded by Alexander Blackwood, the latter being appointed in February 1866.¹³

Infant Mortality in the 19th Century

During the late 19th century, when documentation is more reliable, the infant (less than 1 year) mortality rate was high at 100-140 per 1000 births (compared with less than 10 per 1000 in 1990).¹⁴

There were many infectious diseases causing death in mid to late 19th century Melbourne, which are no longer prevalent. Whilst this circumstance is not necessarily applicable to a rural locale, the most consistent cause were diarrhoeal diseases (dysentery and gastro-enteritis) as local environments were befouled with human and domesticated animal waste. In addition, the Australian fly was a potent vector so that diseases readily spread. Other diseases causing high mortality rates were typhoid, measles, and influenza.¹⁵

Burials in the Melton Area

Until 1861-62, there was no dedicated cemetery in the Melton area. Previously some early inhabitants were taken to Melbourne for burial and in other instances were buried in isolated graves within the municipality. An 1852 survey had not allowed for a cemetery and during the later 1850s, there was growing concern about the lack of such a facility. During August 1860, an application was made to the government and in April 1861, Simon Staughton headed a public meeting to elect Cemetery Trustees and to petition for a registry office (for birth, deaths and marriages) to be established in the district. The earliest burial date in the Melton Cemetery was 5 November 1861.¹⁶

During the 19th century, it was not uncommon for family members to be buried on rural properties.

⁵ J F and H P W Staughton + M P Loader, *The Staughtons of Eynesbury*, pp 40 + 138

⁶ J F and H P W Staughton + M P Loader, *The Staughtons of Eynesbury*, p138

⁷ Ancestry.com, London, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1921

⁸ J F and H P W Staughton + M P Loader, *The Staughtons of Eynesbury*, p138

⁹ J F and H P W Staughton + M P Loader, *The Staughtons of Eynesbury*, p138

¹⁰ Ancestry.com, Victoria, Australia, Cemetery Records and Headstone Transcriptions, 1844-1997

¹¹ 'History of the Registry', Births Deaths and Marriages Victoria website, <https://www.bdm.vic.gov.au/about-us/history-of-the-registry> (accessed 03.05.18)

¹² Michael de Looper, *Death registration and mortality trends in Australia 1856-1906*, PhD thesis ANU, 2014, p50

¹³ *Victoria Government Gazette*, 13 February 1866, no. 19, p.381

¹⁴ Richard Taylor, Milton Lewis & John Powles, 'The Australian mortality decline: all-cause mortality 1788-1990', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 1998, vol. 22. no.1, p30 (fig.9).

¹⁵ 'Diseases and Epidemics, The Encyclopedia of Melbourne online, <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00473b.htm> (accessed 03.05.18)

¹⁶ *Shire of Melton Heritage Study*, vol. 4, pp170-171, 174

Exford

Simon Staughton established himself in the Melton area in 1842, when he took over the squatting run known as Brisbane Ranges and Exford from Dr John Watton. He established the homestead, Exford in 1846, which remained in the Staughton family for about 80 years. The original house, to the west of the subject site overlooking the Werribee River, was constructed from pisé de terre. By the early 1860s, the Exford Estate had expanded to consist of about 70,000 acres of freehold land and Staughton had become one of the most successful squatters in the state.¹⁷

The grave site was initially part of Crown Portion D, Section 4, Parish of Djerriwarrah which was granted to Simon Staughton on 20 February 1855. The area of this allotment was 410 acres, 3 roods and 2 perches (about 166 hectares).¹⁸ Staughton also acquired other allotments in the vicinity, including in the adjoining Parish of Mooradoranook.

After Simon Staughton's death in 1863, his vast holdings were divided between his four sons, with youngest son Harry Werribee Staughton procuring Exford. The other parts became Eynesbury, Brooklyn and Staughton Vale.¹⁹



Djerriwarrah Parish Plan, D62(4). Allotment D indicated (dashed line) and approximated location of the subject site (star)
(Source: PROV)

The land remained part of the core of the Exford Estate after 1907 when extensive subdivision of the outer parts was undertaken after being purchased by the Closer Settlement Board. The board acquired 8020 acres, which it subdivided into some 48 allotments, mostly between 100 to 200 acres, though there were some larger and smaller town allotments.²⁰ By this time, the estate's population had risen to about 150 as tenanted/share farming had been taken up.²¹

¹⁷ Joan Starr, *Melton - Plains of Promise*, pp52-53

¹⁸ Parish Plan, Djerriwarrah D62(4)

¹⁹ J Starr, *Melton - Plains of Promise*, pp53, 56. The other three properties were inherited by the older sons— Simon Fredrick (Staughton Vale), Samuel Thomas (Eynesbury) and Stephen George (Brooklyn). Simon's daughters inherited some of his city properties.

²⁰ 'Exford Estate', *Weekly Times*, 23 March 1907, pp8-9

²¹ *Melbourne Leader*, 9 September 1905, p38

In July 1908, when the first Torrens title for the Exford Estate was created, the grave site remained part of the 1142 acres holdings of the estate, then owned by Harold Werribee Staughton.²² The grave site was physically separated from the Exford homestead in 1911 when the Exford Road was created.²³

The long association with the Staughton family ended in July 1928 when Exford was sold by Harry Werribee Staughton, who died shortly afterwards aged 81 in February 1930.²⁴ At this time, the Estate consisted of 1076 acres and was sold to John and Helen Sutherland, formerly of Elcho near Lara. The Sutherlands subdivided their holdings, transferring the north-eastern part to their son James McWilliam Sutherland.²⁵ The grave however remained associated with the homestead holdings of about 628 acres which were retained by John and Helen until they sold the Estate in October 1949.²⁶ In April 1950, it was transferred to Basil and Bernard Lavery.²⁷ In June 1967, Bernard Lavery and Thelma Crowley Lavery became the proprietors.²⁸

The land on the east side of Exford Road, including the grave site, was subdivided from the main homestead in 2000.²⁹

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis

City of Melton Historical Themes:

Community – towns and people

Pastoralism

Known comparable places in the City of Melton

Historically, this is one of a few examples in the municipality of an isolated grave. Similar marked places include:

- HO45 - Sanger Grave, 1286-92 Calder Highway, Diggers Rest (Place no. 69): A rare instance of a grave testifying to fallen digger en route to the goldfields in 1854. Original headstone dates to c1856, but was relocated nearby and the current monument erected in c.1992, including the original headstone.
- HO82 - George and William Pyke tombstones at the Melton Valley Golf Course, Yuille Street, Melton (Place no. 220): Dating to 1850 and 1855, the graves relate to their pastoral station on Toolern Creek.
- HO124 – Grave, ruin & Archaeological Site, Former 'Greenhills' Pastoral Station, 36-49 O'Connell Avenue, Toolern Vale (Place no. 477): The identity of the deceased is uncertain but thought to be a young woman who died during the late 1840s or early 1850s. The grave is enclosed by a small timber picket fence.
- Graves of the Pinkerton family, Mt Cottrell Road (Place no. 291): The graves were moved about 300 metres to accommodate works of the sewerage authority.³⁰

Isolated graves, some unmarked, are known or thought to have been located at:

- HO10 - Rockbank Inn, Beattys Road (Place no. 317): Thought to be three graves on the site, through one may have been washed away.
- HO24 - Farm Complex at 1229-1279 Gisborne- Melton Road, Toolern Vale (Place no. 29): An early grave is apparently visible near the creek.
- HO110 – Kerr Farm Site, 1780-1882 Boundary Road, Mt Cottrell (Place no. 359): Two children, who probably died from diphtheria during the 1870s, are said to be buried on the property.

²² *Certificate of Title*, vol. 3271/folio 073. Part along the Werribee River in 1915 to State Rivers and Water Supply Commission.

²³ *Victoria Government Gazette*, 30 August 1911, p4427; Put-away (Parish) Plan, D62A_5, 1911

²⁴ *Werribee Shire Banner*, 13 February 1930, p6

²⁵ *Certificate of Title*, vol. 5428/folio 489. The north-eastern part of the Estate, mainly east of the Toolern Creek, consisting of nearly 456 acres.

²⁶ *Certificate of Title*, vol. 5877/folio 278; 'Exford Estate, Melton, Sold', *The Argus*, 12 October 1949, p9

²⁷ *Certificate of Title*, vol. 7570/folio 002. Area of 627 acres

²⁸ *Certificate of Title*, vol. 8687/folio 589

²⁹ Plan of Subdivision, PS422772, 3 July 2000. The grave is part of Lot 4 and Lots 1-3 relate to the property to the north at 398-428 Exford Road.

³⁰ *Shire of Melton Heritage Study*, vol. 3, p316

Condition

Fair

Integrity

Partly intact

Previous Assessment

The site was first identified as being of potential heritage significance in Stage One of the *Shire of Melton Heritage Study, 2002*.³¹ However, in the final report for Stage Two, the site was not included in Schedule 3.

Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls

External Paint Controls	No
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	Yes
Outbuildings and/or Fences	No

Extent of Heritage Overlay

The proposed extent would include the grave, including a curtilage of 5 metres, and the nearby copse of trees.



Recommended extent of Heritage Overlay
(Source: Nearmap 21 April 2018)

³¹

D Moloney, *Shire of Melton Heritage Study Stage One 2002: Places of Potential Heritage Significance*, p73