SHIRE OF MELTON HERITAGE STUDY:

ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

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CHAPTER ONE: EXPLORATION

The volcanic Keilor and Werribee plains figured prominently in two of the most critical early explorations of Port Phillip. In 1803 Grimes' party, after a venture up the Maribyrnong River, reported poorly on the agricultural potential of the district and recommended that Port Phillip was unsuitable for a new settlement. No further exploration occurred until the Hume and Hovell journey of 1824. Their reports of this same land's potential for grazing contrasted dramatically to the earlier assessments, and generated particular interest in Van Diemen's Land where opportunities for pastoral expansion were running out. John Batman's 1835 tour of the area launched a fleet of small craft, brimful of sheep, onto Bass Strait. Harbours at Melbourne, Williamstown and Geelong were founded as the squatters rushed to claim their share of the open volcanic plains to the west and north of Port Phillip Bay. In their wake came surveyors, and even the Governor.

The main legacy of the exploring period in the Shire of Melton are the names of some of its most prominent topographical features, such as Mount Cottrell and Mount Aitken, and, less directly, names such as Exford¹ and Holden Road.

The records of these early tours of discovery of the Shire of Melton are also an important part our cultural heritage, describing as they do its attraction to Europeans, and the reason for Port Phillip's settlement.

The European occupation was of course an historical watershed, leading to the establishment of the city of Melbourne, the surrender of study area by its indigenous inhabitants, and the radical transformation of the landscape. The early tours of exploration constitute an important, although very scant, record of the 'pristine' landscape and its inhabitants in the pre-European era. Remnants of such landscapes – fragments of woodlands, grassland expanses, or views remarked upon by the explorers – might today be valued as part of our 'European' cultural heritage.

Matthew Flinders

In April 1802 Matthew Flinders brought the *Investigator* into the bay, and from the summit of the You Yangs (which he named Station Peak), became probably first non-Aboriginal person to obtain a view towards the Melton area. He described a 'low plain' covered with:-

'low plain where the water appeared frequently to lodge; it was covered with small-blade grass but almost destitute of wood, and the soil was clayey and shallow ... Towards the interior there was a mountain [Mount Macedon] ... and so far the country was low, grassy, and very slightly covered with wood ...'.²

Charles Grimes

Early descriptions of the plains area west of the Maribyrnong River were instrumental in a long delay in Port Phillip's settlement. In January 1803 Charles Grimes' party entered Port Phillip with instructions from Governor King to survey the bay and report on its suitability for settlement. They rowed up the Maribyrnong as far the rock barrier at Avondale Heights. James Flemming recorded his impressions upon climbing the west embankment of the river:-

¹ The Werribee River was originally known as the River Exe. This was almost certainly named after an English river in the very early stages of Port Phillip settlement. Later, Simon Staughton, whose English home had been near this same river, named his station on the river *Exford*.

² 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.3

"...went about two miles on the hills which are level at top and full of stones, the land very bad, and very few trees, and appeared so to the mountains."

The inhabitants of the Port Jackson (Sydney) settlement had nearly starved to death in its foundation years, and the imperatives of water and arable land exerted a powerful influence on the Grimes' expedition to Port Phillip. Flemming, a gardener-botanist, had been sent specifically to examine the suitability of the area's soil and timber for settlement. Grimes returned to Port Jackson in 1803 with an unfavourable report which, together with the failure of the Collins Sorrento settlement, discouraged official interest in Port Phillip for over twenty years.

Grimes himself however had noted on the 'excellent pasture ... thin of timber', and identified its resources for building: there was 'fine clay for bricks, and abundance of stone'. But he also noted that the area was 'very badly watered'. 4

During this period John Macarthur and others had developed wool growing as a staple export industry for Australia, and sheep-runs were spreading across the land. By the time of the next Port Phillip expedition, by Hume and Hovell in 1824, there was a very different yardstick with which to measure the worth of land.

William Hume and Hamilton Hovell

After a difficult overland journey, William Hume and Hamilton Hovell emerged from the rough forest-clad Dividing Range, scaled a hill, and surveyed the landscape sloping south towards the bay:-

'...we saw a very gratifying sight, this was very extensive plain, extending from W to SE for several miles with patches of forests which appear to separate one plain from another, but the whole appeared in front (say) south to be level, but in parts in the plains rose some hills, shaped conical with only here and there a few trees upon them, and all the soil the best quality.'5

Hovell surveyed the view south-east to west, over the study area, and declared:

"...never did I behold a more charming and gratifying sight, at least not where it is in its natural state."

It could not have been a more different appraisal from that made by Flemming 20 years earlier. Vast, sparsely treed grasslands, even with a few stones, were now immensely valuable.

On the 15th December 1824 Hume and Hovell crossed Jacksons Creek near the Organ Pipes Park, and proceeded across the plains of 'Iramoo' (between the Maribyrnong and Werribee Rivers) and towards 'Jillong' (Geelong). They crossed the Shire in a south westerly direction,

⁵Andrews, AEJ (ed), *Hume and Hovell 1924*, (Blubber Head Press, Hobart, 1981), p 201

³ 'James Flemming, Journal of Exploration of Port Phillip made by Charles Grimes, Surveyor General of New South Wales', in J.J. Shillinglaw (ed.), *Historical Records of Port Phillip*, (Melbourne, Heinemann, 1972), C.E. Sayers (ed.) p.27.

⁴ Lack, Ford, op cit, p.4

⁶ *ibid*, p 203. Hovell was apparently aware that his superlative description of the land was portentous, and also that explorers were prone to overstate the significance of their discoveries. He went on to emphasise that this description of the area was not an exaggeration, and that he was conscious that his reputation would be damaged if it proved so. See also Lemon, A. *Broadmeadows: A Forgotten History*, (City of Broadmeadows\ Hargreen, Melbourne, 1982), p.11.

possibly between Mounts Cottrell and Atkinson, before camping the night on the Werribee River, probably in the vicinity of Cobbledick's Ford. Hovell's journal entry for the day records:-

"...I am happy to find that this country is better watered than I first imagined, even in this dry time there is plenty; the worst thing against it is there not being a sufficiency of timber for the purpose of building ... but there is plenty near for fuel... It is all plains and small forests around."

That night Hovell was inspired to grand - indeed prophetic - speculation on the future of Port Phillip. It would be the beachhead for the opening up of the rich pastoral hinterland of southeast Australia, as far as the Murray River:-

'From what I have observed today, it is from this country that a communication with the interior will be the easiest of access, and the returning with their produce...we can see at least 50 miles in any direction, it is all plains and small forest around ... the whole is easy travelling ...'

Not only would Port Phillip settlers:

'have the advantage [over Sydney] of easy access with the interior, where their bounds will be unlimited, but they will have the advantage in another respect ... as a nautical man I may be allowed to point out [that] they will have the first arrivals from India and England, even before the Derwant (sic) ...' 9

Continuing his reflections on the Melton plains that they had crossed that day, Hovell noted that:- 'the soil everywhere were (sic) beyond description good'. To a pastoral society, his comments on grass growth were critical; even in this drought year:-

'The grass does not appear to have grown more than two or three inches since it was burned last year; the old grass which escaped the fire is very thick and long'. 10

Amongst his further reflections that night Hovell compared the country to England's Norfolk 'that is supposed to be the levelest (sic) County, and has the best soil', also noting that, in fact the country they had crossed that day was in fact subject to a gradual descent. He also noted the high banks of the Werribee river, which Hume named Arndell, after Hovell's father-in-law and his son.

In the light of his acclamatory assessment of the Melton area, it is interesting to note that on their return from Corio Bay the party took a more southerly route, closer to the bay, as 'by doing so we avoided those stones which we had crossed on going'. Hovell did admit that 'there are parts of the plains where it is very stoney', but noted also that 'there are parts for a considerable distance where there is not a stone to be seen'. The grass and herbage of the plains, 'notwithstanding it is dry'd (sic) and parched up by the long drought which has shrivelled up the leaves ... is generally of a fine silky nature, and in places it is intermixed

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⁷ Andrews, *op cit*, pp.202, 207-211. An early twentieth century cairn situated just outside the Shire, on the corner of Ballarat and Station Roads Deer Park, commemorates the explorers, and marks what was thought to be the route at the time.

⁸ *ibid*, p.207

⁹ *ibid*, pp.207, 209. (Note that at the time the explorers thought that they were describing Westernport.)

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.211

¹¹ *ibid*, p.229

¹² *ibid*, p.215

with the long forest grass.' Similarly, after further travelling, Hovell moderated somewhat his initial comments on the soil, noting that the 'soil generally speaking is very good ... I have seen none bad, but I have seen some (I do not speak of a few acres, but of large spaces) equal to the best of any land.' 14

Hovell also noted potential building materials - lime, clay, stone and timber - for the plains settlement he envisaged. Certainly in regard to the pise *Exford* homestead (20 years later) he again proved prophetic:- 'the inhabitants must take to the plan of Pice (sic) building, which is as durable as the stone itself'. ¹⁵

Despite the areas of stony ground, and the drought, in all the explorers pronounced the plains area '...a fine fertile country'.

John Batman

John Batman had been a childhood friend of Hume, and the reports of the expedition encouraged his own plan to explore 'the interior of New Holland'. ¹⁶ As early as 1827 Batman and JT Gellibrand had written from Launceston to the Governor of NSW seeking permission to explore and settle the grazing land across Bass Strait. Permission was refused.

By the 1830s the shortage of new pastures in Van Diemen's Land prompted Batman (on behalf of the Port Phillip Association) to ignore the Sydney authorities and explore Port Phillip, at the same time purchasing the land from its Aboriginal owners. Batman's exploration was preoccupied with 'sheep country' – the open grasslands on the basalt plains west and north of the bay. The forests and sandy soils along the Yarra River and to the east of the bay were ignored.¹⁷

In May 1835 Batman made for Hume and Hovells' 'Iramoo downs', between the Maribyrnong and Werribee Rivers. He travelled along the west bank of the Maribyrnong River making sure 'to get a view of Mounts Collicot, Cottrell and Connolly'. He past Braybrook and at Keilor took a WNW bearing over the plains. After passing a 'large flock of emus' and some wild geese, he ascended a 'beautiful hill' (named Mt Iramoo on his map). This hill is of historical importance, as from it Batman spied the smoke from an Aboriginal camp. He set out in the direction of the smoke, until at last he found some Aboriginal 'chiefs' with whom to make a treaty. Whilst the evidence is inconclusive, and the best recent historical interpretation puts this hill near to Sunbury, probably Redstone Hill, 18 since at least 1885 Mt Kororoit in Melton Shire has also had serious claims to the honour. 19

¹³ *ibid*, p.213

¹⁴ *ibid*, p.213

¹⁵ *ibid*, p.215 The original *Exford* homestead, built of pise, and one of the first 'permanent' buildings in the Shire, is still in use.

¹⁶Sayers, C.E.(ed.), Bonwick, J., *John Batman, The Founder of Victoria*,(1867), facsimile edition, (Wren, Melbourne, 1973), pp xiii, 13-15.

¹⁷Duncan, JS, 'The Port Phillip Association Maps', in *The Globe* (No 32, 1989), p 54. The east of

¹/Duncan, JS, 'The Port Phillip Association Maps', in *The Globe* (No 32, 1989), p 54. The east of Melbourne was completely ignored if one accepts Harcourt's argument that Batman's treaty – the easternmost point of his exploratory journey - was conducted at the Merri Creek in Northcote. (Rex Harcourt, *Southern Invasion, Northern Conquest: Story of the Founding of Melbourne*, Golden Point Press, Blackburn South, 2000)

¹⁸ Duncan, op cit, passim; also Harcourt, op cit, p.38.

¹⁹ James Blackburn, 'The Locality of Batman's Treaty with the Port Phillip Natives' (Paper read before the Historical Society of Australia, on Friday 27th November 1885), p.6; also Campbell, A.H. 'Discovering Batman's Port Phillip Exploration', in *Victorian Historical Journal* (Vol 62, Nos 3,4), pp. 98-106. Nineteenth century Sunbury pioneer and memorialist Isaac Batey, in his Historical Manuscript held at the RHSV (1910), also speculated that Mt Iramoo was not Redstone Hill, because neither

Iramoo was not Mt Kororoit, the view obtained by Batman certainly included Melton Shire. From its top he surveyed '...a view all round, I think I may say 40 miles or more each way, of beautiful plains of the best description of grass'. Flocks of sheep would be 'almost lost' on them; but again, dryness remained a question mark for Batman: 'the only thing at present is the want of water, but am sure it could be obtained by digging in almost any place.' 21

Again the beauty, and pastoral potential, of the plains of Melton Shire was subject to high praise from European explorers.

John Helder Wedge

On Batman's return to Launceston, the Port Phillip Association arranged for its member and former Surveyor General of Van Diemen's Land, John Helder Wedge to prepare a suitable map of the land the Association now claimed for itself. The probable route of his journey, reconstructed from early maps and journals, has Wedge following Batman's route up to Mt Iramoo, but then continuing west and south to the Werribee River, through the Shire of Melton. His descriptions of his travels on the 5th and 6th of September 1835 provides a few references to the landscape of Melton in Spring.



The 'Wedge MS' map, redrawn by JS Duncan from original in La Trobe Library. The numbers refer to the Port Phillip Association's allotments.

('The Port Phillip Association Maps', JS Duncan)

Wedge appears to have travelled west across the upper branches of Kororoit Creek for about 10 kilometres, keeping a 'range of grassy hills on our right, which brought us to a ridge of hills projecting into the plains'. In these hills, probably west of Blackhill Road, he observed 'a few Ironbark trees, and a small quantity of useful gums for the pit' (ie, able to be sawn into building timbers). Crossing this ridge he crossed 'another fine valley of no great extent',

²¹ Lack, Ford, op cit, p.6

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Brodie's forest nor the 'splendid white box forest which finished near G Coghill's boiling down works', above the Deep Creek junction with Jacksons Creek, would have been missed by Batman.

²⁰ Harcourt, op cit, p.154

²² Duncan, *op cit*, pp.51-2

bringing him to more hills. As these became steeper and more thickly wooded, he turned south 'for the purpose of getting on the plains, passing between the hills and a flat forest'. He then bore more westward:

'through the same forest, to a deep watercourse, which at times is subject to heavy floods, but at this time we only found water at places.' 'After ascending the hills for about a mile, I came to an open plain, and directing my course south-west for about two miles I came to a belt of forest trees, and in about another mile to the river Peel' (ie, the Werribee River).²³

This route would appear to have incorporated the upper Toolam Toolern Creek, and to have passed through the site of Melton town to the Werribee in a location said to be near the present Exford Weir.²⁴

Strangely, given that previous watercourses had been dry, the Werribee was in high flood. 'I almost despaired of finding a crossing place, although the river was not very wide, not more than from ten to twelve yards; but from the power of the stream, every tree had been swept away...'. Wedge had to travel upstream for about a mile looking for a tree fallen across the stream on which he could cross. Eventually his party improvised a bridge from a leaning tree. Next day, at the top of the river gorge, they crossed over land that was probably later a part of the later Exford pastoral run:- 'about 1.5 miles ... was a light sandy description, the Honeysuckle tree prevailing.' Then there was about 6 miles of forest until the open plain towards Anakie was reached. Wedge noted that 'there is not much grass in the forest'. 26

Governor Bourke

In March 1837 Governor Sir Richard Bourke visited the new colony at Port Phillip. He and Captain Phillip Parker King both recorded their excursion around the barely settled Port Phillip district. Bourke describes the stage from the Salt Water (Maribyrnong) River to the 'Exe or Werribee' as 'flat open country, great part of herbage recently burned. No water. Soil poor – grass hardly of the value of that of the Goulburn Plains... bleak ... and cold for sheep.'27 This route, from the ford at Avondale Heights, passed very close to the south east corner of the Shire of Melton. The party camped at the station of Simpson and Wedge on the Werribee, where Bourke describes the landscape as 'bleak in winter and cold for sheep'.

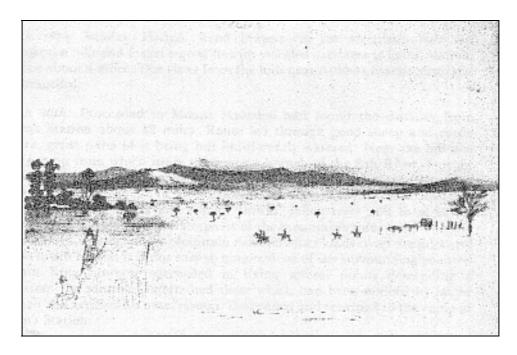
King's journal provides another perspective. While Bourke was speculating on the affect of the exposed location on sheep in winter, at the 'Exe or Werribee' King notes that they 'took shelter from a hot sun in a shepherd's hut (Simpsons station)'. He left a pen-and-ink sketch of his parched-looking party approaching the shepherd's hut, with the Melton hills as a backdrop to the exposed plains. He noted that the river was easily distinguished from a distance by the row of gum trees along its banks. King's impressions of the Little River area were of: 'a most arid waste; the grass had been burned off. We met no one and saw no living thing but a brown (venomous) snake.'28

²³ Bonwick, J, *Port Phillip Settlement* (Sampson Law, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, London, 1883), p.261.

Duncan, op cit, pp.44-51

²⁵ Honeysuckle was the name used for the Banksia tree in this period.

²⁷ Cannon, M (ed) Historical Records of Victoria, Vol.1: Beginnings of Permanent Government (VGPO, Melbourne, 1981), p.103 ²⁸ *ibid*, p.110



Captain PP King's sketch of the ford at Werribee, looking north towards Melton (1837) (Historical Records of Victoria, Vol.1, p.104)

After journeying around some 'fine sheep walks' on the Moorabool and Barwon Rivers, and Barrabool Hills, the party left for 'Clarke's station on the Werribee'. After passing through a wood of box trees for three miles a very beautiful valley and view of the ranges appeared. In language as sanguine as he ever used about Port Phillip, Bourke reported:

'The valleys of the Werribee and its tributaries are here very beautiful and abound with herbage of a rich though coarse description and the enclosing slopes, both good sheep pasture. On the whole these (with the exception of part of Illawarra) are the finest I have seen in the Colony. The scenes from some of the surrounding heights are very picturesque.'30

King notes that the crossing was in the vicinity of the three branches of the Werribee. Presumably this site was near the junctions of the Lerderderg and Parwan Rivers, and Djerriwarrh Creek.

The next day the party set out to find the station of 'Mr Sams on the Salt River' (Jackson's station, the site of Rupertswood in Sunbury). In doing so they seem to have made virtually the same trip, in the opposite direction, across the Shire of Melton as had Wedge 18 months previously. As with Wedge, the Werribee River proved formidable:

'Crossed the Werribee by a ford of our own discovery, but not without much labour and being obliged to unload the dray. The ascent from the valley of that river was very steep and difficult as was the passage of a creek – called by the English Penny Royal Creek – now the dry bed of a river in a very deep ravine.'31

³¹ *ibid*, p.105.

²⁹ *ibid*, pp. 103-4. This would likely have been Kenneth Clarke, who had squatted with his flock in the Pentland Hills – Werribee River area at about this time.

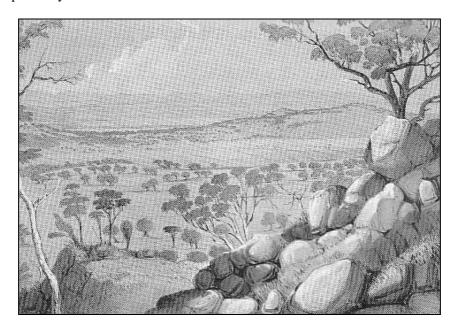
³⁰ *ibid*, p.104

The Werribee crossing was probably made downstream of the Djerriwarrh Creek junction, at the present-day Exford Weir, very near where Wedge had crossed. The Penny Royal Creek was later named Toolam Toolern Creek and later, simply, Toolern Creek.

After ascending the Toolern Creek ravine the party crossed:

'some plains of rather good herbage and sheltered by woods that fringed their exterior, thence crossing one chain of ponds where there is fresh water. Reached another under Mount Cotteril where we encamped ... Country to the north of Mount Cotteril open and of rather a good description and totally enclosed by the two chains of ponds'.

There can be little doubt, on the evidence of Bourke's description of the country and the various directions and distances cited, as well as King's journal reference to these streams rising in the valleys of Mt Aitken, that the party was in fact camped at what we now know as Mt Kororoit (known locally as Mt Misery), in the vicinity of the Kororoit Creek, rather than at the hill presently known as Mt Cottrell.



'View from MtAitken Looking Towards the Dandenong Ranges' (1852) (PL Brown, The Narrative of George Russell, p.162)

The next day they continued 8 miles to Sams' station (at Sunbury), across some 'good sheep downs', and thence back over 'an elevated plain amongst the hills' upon which there was 'excellent herbage and frequent waterholes' to John Aitken's sheep station (in Melton Shire). The next day, being Sunday, they 'remained quiet' and 'read prayers'. King records that: 'Divine Service was performed, perhaps for the first time in these lonely wilds.' Bourke took advantage of the rest to admire the view again, recording simply: 'The views from the hills near Aitken's Station extensive and beautiful'. The party then moved on to Mt Macedon, and back to Melbourne via the Jacksons, Deep and Merri Creeks.

King notes that Bourke named Mt Aitken after John Aitken, and Mt Holden at Sunbury after Captain Holden, one of the party. Presumably this 'bare hill' was subsequently responsible

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³² *ibid*, p.114

³³ *ibid*, p.105, 110

for the naming of the Parish of Holden, which it overlooks, and consequently the 'Holden Road', which connects the Shire of Melton with what was the original Holden village reserve, and later a small farming district, on Jacksons Creek.

Major Mitchell

In September 1836 Major Mitchell had ascended and named Mt. Macedon, which became a landmark for the settlers in the area.

CHAPTER TWO: THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

Our knowledge of first inhabitants of the Shire of Melton is scant. They were moved on, one way or another, within a very few years of the European invasion. They had tread lightly on the landscape, with middens, flint sites and scatters of tools, and some scarred trees (Melton Golf Links being the best known), remaining as evidence of their occupation. However there would appear to be even less evidence of Aboriginal life after the arrival of the Europeans:-they are known to have lived and died on the Exford station, Mount Kororoit, and John Aitken's station was the scene of a number of conflicts with Aboriginal people. It is unlikely that the exact site of the historic murders that took place on Franks' station 'near Mount Cotteril on the Werribee River' – the most historic conflict site in early Melbourne - will ever be known, given that Franks and his shepherd appear to have been there for only a few weeks.³⁴

In a sense, however, the whole landscape - the open plains, hills, streams and forests - is a link to the Shire's pre-European inhabitants. This was recognised by the early surveyors and government officials who gave Aboriginal names to prominent features such as Mt Kororoit, and Djerriwarrh and Toolam Toolern Creeks. Parishes were named Djerriwarrh, Pywheitjorrk, Buttlejorrk, Mooradoranook, Yangardook and Maribyrnong. Others were named after prominent early Koories, such as Derrimut, and in adjacent municipalities, Tullamarine and Truganina. These names are amongst the most enduring evidence of the pre-European, and 'contact' eras.

The Pre-Contact Period

It is only in recent times that we have discovered how ancient in world terms is the human occupation of the district.³⁵ In 1940 a quarry worker at nearby Keilor discovered a 15,000 year old skull. At the time this was the earliest dateable evidence of human occupation in Australia. Further archaeological investigation of the area in the 1960s and 70s found evidence of human occupation dating back 40,000 years.³⁶ In 1977, on the Werribee River towards Cobbledicks Ford, a group of Koorie burials was discovered during sand mining operations. The 7300 year-old remains exhibited evidence of ritual treatment, the bodies having been dried out prior to burial and the bones stained with red ochre.³⁷

The Shire of Melton was the boundary between two of the major tribes in the Kulin nation: the *Woiworung*, to the east of the Werribee River as far as Healesville and the Yarra catchment, and the *Wathaurung* on the west side of the Werribee, who lived on the Bellarine Peninsula and into the Otway Ranges. These tribes, with different but related language groups, were divided into clans. The *Wathaurung* clan that lived to the west side of the Werribee River was the *Marpeang-bulluk*. There were two *Woirorung* clans in the Melton area. The *Kurung-jang-balluk* territory extended from the Werribee River to the Kororoit Creek. (These Werribee plains people derived their name from *Kurunjang*, which means 'red

³⁴ George Smith, in Cannon, HRV, Vol.2A, *op cit*, p.43. This is the best description of the general location of the site by someone who had actually seen it. However, R. Spreadborough and H. Anderson (in *Victorian Squatters*, Red Rooster Press, 1983) do map the site, so perhaps there is some documentary evidence that enables it to be located.

³⁵ Modern requirements for site-specific archaeological investigations prior to large development proposals (eg suburban subdivision or freeway development) continue to find many more pre-contact Aboriginal sites, such as 'scatters' of tools, and middens.

³⁶ Presland, G, *Aboriginal Melbourne: The Lost Land of the Kulin People* (McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1994), pp.128, 110, 120

³⁷ *ibid*, p.145

earth'. ³⁸) The other clan was the *Marin-Balluk*, who occupied the land from the Kororoit Creek to the Maribyrnong River. Clans were the most social important group, whose members all knew the precise boundaries of their land, which they regarded as their own since the time of Dreaming or creation. Clans and tribes within the Kulin nation interacted for a variety of purposes. ³⁹

As clans could include as many as a hundred people, day-to-day activities and travelling were conducted in smaller family-based units, usually called a band. The people only came together in large groups for particular ceremonies or to exploit abundant seasonal food resources. Rare earth rings at nearby Sunbury, thought to be associated with male initiation ceremonies, suggest that this was the venue of especially significant ceremonies. It was a resource-rich area, whose ample supplies of food and water could support large numbers of people for ceremonies involving numerous clans.⁴⁰

The treed hills around Melton would have provided shelter, timber for building and tools, possums and other foods, while kangaroo and emu could be hunted on the open plains to the east. Both the Hume and Hovell party in 1824 and Governor Bourke's party in 1837 had noted the newly burnt grass of the plains. The Aboriginal practice was to attract game by burning the plains in Autumn to promote fresh grass growth for the following season. This also kept other growth down and facilitated travelling. The waterways would have provided a rich variety of fish, eels, freshwater mussels, waterbirds, game and materials for implements (such as baskets and weapons) and shelter. The women cultivated the murnong (yam daisy) root vegetable, an Aboriginal dietary staple, in areas of richer soil.⁴¹

In addition, the rocky country of the area would appear to have provided a particular opportunity for the people of Melton. The 1803 Grimes party had found an Aboriginal fish trap on the Maribyrnong near Keilor.⁴² In 1835 Batman happened upon another fish trap at the other end of the plains near the You Yangs, possibly on Hovell Creek. His description indicates that these were substantial and extensive structures:-

'We saw several places on going up, which the natives had made with stones across the creek, to take fish; I suppose in summer time. The walls were built of stones about four feet high, and well done and well planned out. Two or three of these places following each other down the stream with gates to them, which they appear to stop with a bundle of rushes. We saw those in about ten or twelve different places up this stream.'43

Similar structures are likely to have been built on Melton streams to trap fish or eels

In the nearby Sunbury-Bulla district most Aboriginal archaeological sites have been located on or near waterways, with eruption points or volcanic hilltops being another favoured position. The plains themselves show a much lower density of sites.⁴⁴ The same is likely to

³⁸ Massola, A, *Bunjil's Cave: Myths, Legends and Superstitions of the Aborigines of South-East Australia* (Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1968), p.xiv.

³⁹ Presland, *op cit*, pp.36-40, 43-44

⁴⁰Sutherland, P, Richards, T, 'Shire of Bulla Aboriginal Archaeological Study' (Shire of Bulla, Australian Heritage Commission, Aboriginal Affairs Melbourne, September 1994), pp 17-18, citing Frankl. (It is interesting that Sunbury later became an important area for major European ceremonies; see Chapter 8, 'Stage').

⁴¹ Sutherland, 1994, op cit, p 16; Batey, (1910) op cit, p. 87

⁴² Presland (1994), op cit, p.18

⁴³ Batman's diary, in Harcourt, op cit, p.151

⁴⁴ Sutherland, 1994, op cit, pp.25-27, 31-33.

be the case with respect to the Shire of Melton waterways, and its prominent volcanic hills. Mt Kororoit, apparently an Aboriginal 'camping ground' in the pre-contact era, continued as such in the contact era, encouraged by the Moylan family.⁴⁵

The Contact Period

Until they reached the Iramoo plains Hume and Hovell had not seen any Koorie people on their whole journey. Crossing Jacksons Creek however they found a camp 'where the natives had been a few days back', and in the Lara area they had their first encounter. It was anything but welcoming. One of their party, off duck shooting, was surprised by two armed natives who chased him. His gun misfired, but he was able to make it back to the rest of the party, whereupon the two ran away. At their next meeting the two parties came to a suspicious truce. The Aboriginal people indicated that they had recently had some contact with European vessels. While Hovell gave trinkets as a means of buying goodwill and safety, he was indignant that one of the Aboriginal men tried to steal a spoon and pot. Hovell decided to abandon the place, feeling that the Aboriginals' general conduct was 'very suspicious and treacherous', and fearing the 'signals' (fires) that were being made around them. The natives however were 'dradfully (sic) alarmed' at their horses and bullocks.

In 1835, Batman assisted by his Sydney Aboriginals, made more successful contact with a group of Aboriginal women and children in this same area, giving them blankets, beads, sugar, apples looking glasses etc. Undoubtedly, members of the Port Phillip Association such as Batman, Gellibrand and Wedge had a genuine desire to engage the Port Phillip Aboriginal people, and were assisted enormously in this by William Buckley. Still, it was very much in the Association's interest to document and promote such good intentions; for example its preference that married rather than single men work on the sheep stations, to reduce the prospect of outrages against the blacks.⁴⁸ Given the circumstances of frontier life, any such hope, if sincere, was naïve.

On their side, in the early years Aboriginal people generally seem to have treated the first arrivals to the area well. When John Aitken's cargo of sheep ran aground near Arthur's seat in March 1836, the Aborigines helped to get the stock ashore, and guided him to the Yarra settlement. George Evans induced a party of Aborigines to show him the country, where, in July 1836, he made his *Emu Bottom* station. It was commonplace for Aboriginal people to show the newcomers the best sites in a district. When Governor Bourke arrived at Melbourne and Geelong, great numbers of Aboriginal people, friends of Buckley, gathered to meet him. In response, the Governor presented the usual tokens of clothes and blankets.

John Aitken, whose station was situated in the north of the Shire, recounted how a tribe of about 100 natives had come to his tent soon after he arrived at Mt Aitken. He 'did all in my power to conciliate them, by giving them rations of rice, sugar, flour etc while they remained about the place.' He expressed the view that what he called this 'Mt Macedon tribe' was

⁴⁵ Judith Bilszta, re Moylan.

⁴⁶ Andrews, op cit, pp. 207, 219-225

⁴⁷ As early as 1803 a government exploratory party member had noticed what looked like smallpox marks on the face of a member of a Bellarine Koorie. Sealers and whalers had operated along this coast for decades prior to 1835.

⁴⁸ Sayers, C.E.(ed), Bride, T.F., *Letters From Victorian Pioneers*, facsimile edition (Lloyd O'Neill, Melbourne 1983), p.34; Garden, D, *Victoria: A History*, (Nelson, Melbourne, 1984), p 32.

⁵⁰ Presland, G.(ed) *Journals of George Augustus Robinson, January-March 1840*, (Records of the Victorian Archaeological Society, No.5,1977) p.4.; O'Donnell, *op.cit.*, pp.62-3.

⁵¹ HRV, Vol, 1, op cit, p.110

"...more savage than the Western Port tribe, a neighbour of mine (Mr Franks) and his servant being murdered by serving out food to them ... I had great reason to be thankful that I succeeded in saving myself and shepherds from sharing a similar fate'. ⁵²

John Page of *Glencoe* at nearby Holden, recounted a similar incident with the blacks in these very early years. He estimated that 200 males, naked and fully armed, emerged from the sheoaks and approached his sod hut. He armed himself with a large knife and double-barrelled shotgun with which to 'settle two of them' if they attacked. Page and the blacks 'yabbered' at each other for a time, after which, much to his relief, they wheeled around and marched off. As there were no women or children with them, he guessed that 'they were on the way to fight with some tribe.' ⁵³ This was very possible, as at the time the European's arrived, the Woiwurong and the Wathaurung tribes (whose border was the Werribee River) were at war. ⁵⁴

Derrimut, of the Bunurong tribe to Melbourne's south-east, after whom the Parish of Derrimut in Melton Shire is named, proved himself a saviour of the Europeans. He had disclosed and circumvented an Aboriginal plan to massacre the few residents of the fledgling Melbourne settlement.⁵⁵ Later he was one of a party of Melbourne natives induced (apparently by squatter Roadknight) to kill some troublesome blacks in the Geelong-Colac area. As a result the Wathaurung clans massed for an attack on Melbourne's Woiwurong and Bunurong tribes.⁵⁶ Although commemorated by a special headstone at the Melbourne General Cemetery, Derrimut seems to have had a troubled life as a result of his European contact and divided loyalties – he was often drunk, and accused of discharging firearms and even murdering at least one other Koorie at the Yarra Aboriginal camp.⁵⁷

Relations between the settlers and the Aboriginal people soon began to deteriorate. By early 1836 several murders had been reported: of natives by whites at Western Port; and two shepherds on Charles Swanston's Werribee station.⁵⁸ Squatters and shepherds, alone and outnumbered by the blacks, were always wary and fearful in the initial phase of settlement.

But it was the murder of a squatter - 'Mr Franks' - and his shepherd Flinders, in Melton Shire at Mt. Cotterell, in early July 1836, that appears to have been the watershed in the black-white relationships. Franks had only been on the sheep-run for a few weeks, when he and his shepherd were found killed by tomahawk blows to the head, and his supplies pilfered. The incident inflamed the community; the whole of the fledgling Melbourne settlement attended their funeral.⁵⁹ Even moderate opinion thought the tragedy 'another instance of the folly of putting any confidence in the native population'.⁶⁰ For some time 'Mt Franks' was an alternative name for 'Mt Cotteril'.⁶¹

In the wake of the murders, on 28th July prominent squatter George MacKillop advised the Colonial Secretary that unless the Government intervened, he feared 'there will be a war of

⁵² Sayers, Bride, *op.cit.*, pp.49-50.

⁵³ Batey, (1910) *op.cit*, p.9.

⁵⁴ Massola, *op cit*, p.xiv.

⁵⁵ Harcourt, op cit, p.90

⁵⁶ Cannon, HRV Vol.2A op cit, p.728.

⁵⁷ *ibid*, pp. 557, 559, 563, 568, 571, 574, 586-590, 600, 606.

⁵⁸ Harcourt, *op cit*, pp.90-91

⁵⁹ Anderson, H (ed), Gurner, HF *Chronicle of Port Phillip Now the Colony of Victoria from 1770 to 1840* (Red Rooster Press, Melbourne, 1978), p.30

⁶⁰ Brown, PL (ed), *The Narrative of George Russell of Golf Hill*, (Oxford University Press, London: Humphrey Milford, 1935), p 111.

⁶¹ See, eg, CPO Map Rail 19 (March 1856). There were many early spellings of this landmark, including Mount Cotterell, Mount Cotterell, and Mount Cotteril.

extermination at Port Phillip, like what took place here some years ago. And indeed, with the memory of Tasmania's Black Wars still fresh, several parties gathered at Franks' Mt Cottrell station, and set out in pursuit of the murderers. A few days later a group of about 80 natives were tracked down (with the help of Aboriginal trackers, including Derrimut) to a camp well up the Werribee River, and fired on.

On 18th August the Tasmanian Colonial Secretary expressed his concern to Sydney at the 'rupture' between the Europeans and natives as a result of these incidents, advising that '...there can be little or no doubt that ten of the tribe of Port Phillip natives were killed'. One account had it that:

'They let fly at them, killed a grate (sic) many, and what was not killed or wounded, ran away leaving all behind them.' 65

A few weeks later Governor Bourke instructed Melbourne's new Magistrate William Lonsdale to investigate this alleged massacre, and apprehend any offenders with a view to 'committing them to Sydney Gaol for trial'. Unsurprisingly perhaps, although all the witnesses to the investigation (the pursuing party) heard shots being fired ('above their [the natives'] heads'), no-one saw anyone killed. As a result of this evidence, Lonsdale reported that the accounts circulating in Sydney 'must have been very much exaggerated'. 66

Although most contemporaries described Franks as a notably mild and unprovocative man, another noted that he 'had a great aversion to the native blacks, and would not give them food, thinking it the best way to prevent them frequenting the station.' Another respected early squatter - von Steiglitz - reportedly said that Franks called his bullets 'blue pills' for the natives. 68

It is probably also relevant that in February 1836, just five months prior to the Franks murder, JT Gellibrand recounted the Port Phillip natives' distress at the abduction of a young woman 'near the shepherds' hut on No.10'.⁶⁹ No.10 was the section allocated by Batman's Port Phillip Association to Anthony Cotterell, after whom Mt Cottrell was named. The site of an 'old hut' in this location is marked on an early plan, c.1.5 kilometres south-west of the summit of Mt Cotterell.⁷⁰ This was likely the shepherd's hut scene of the earlier offence, and

⁶² Canon, M (ed.) *Historical Records of Victoria, Vol.2A, The Aborigines of Port Phillip, 1835-1839* (VGPO, Melbourne, 1982), p.40

⁶³ HRV, Vol.2A, *op cit*, pp.36-52. Also, Koorie Cultural Heritage Trust, *Koorie* (Creative Solutions, Melbourne, 1991) p.19. The myths surrounding the incident appear to have lived on, and indeed grown, over time. Batey (1910), *op cit*, pp.9-10, recounts a conversation with an early squatter in the region (but unreliable witness according to another contemporary), Kenneth Clarke, who claimed he was one of the pursuing party. He said they came across the tribe camping on the banks of the Werribee, near Ballan, and fired on them without effect. At the campsite the pursuers claimed to have found 'the hand of a picaninny that had been roasted and eaten'. Batey's own subsequent assessment of the rugged landscape in this area confirmed to him the likelihood that '*all the pursuers could do was fire at the niggers at range too long for the weapons of the era to do execution'*.

⁶⁴ HRV, Vol.2A, *op cit*, p.42. Other reports put the number killed at 10-15 (Harcourt, *op cit*, p.91)

⁶⁴ HRV, Vol.2A, *op cit*, p.42. Other reports put the number killed at 10-15 (Harcourt, *op cit*, p.91) Given that Governor Arthur had declared the Black War, believing that the aboriginal people were 'a most treacherous race', (Shaw, AGL, Clark, CMH, *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol.1*, MUP, 1996, p.35), this concern is notable.

⁶⁵ Harcourt, op cit, p.91.

⁶⁶ *ibid*, pp.46-51

⁶⁷ Canon, HRV, Vol.2A, op cit, pp.43-4

⁶⁸ Brown, op cit, 112

⁶⁹ Sayers, Bride, op.cit., pp.28-9.

⁷⁰ Lands Victoria Map PR E20 (12/3/1853)

perhaps also of the murders. Although Franks was not at Port Phillip at this time, it is clear that there were already real tensions between the Aboriginal and European peoples in the Marin-Balluk clan's territory within Melton Shire.⁷¹

The Aboriginal people soon comprehended that the Europeans were in fact settling permanently - invading their lands - and began to take stock of the injuries they had incurred. They began to steal and maim sheep, sometimes to murder shepherds, and to beg or threaten squatters for flour and tobacco. Increasingly, they were described as 'troublesome'.



A later artist's impression of Aboriginal people stalking a shepherd and his sheep. (Historical Records of Victoria, Vol.2A, p.45)

John Aitken seems to have had more 'incidents' with the blacks than most early squatters. George Russell described him locked in hand to hand combat with a single native, from whom he managed to escape only by mounting his horse and galloping off. Another pioneer squatter, Kenneth Clarke (although not a reliable witness according to one contemporary), gave a different perspective:- 'Aitken would not permit the aborigines to trespass upon his run, and also...the blacks feared him. One of his [Clarke's] items was to the effect that Aitken grappling with a native did his best to break the mans neck.' The blacks' antipathy towards

⁷¹ Neither is Cotterel known to have been in Port Phillip or had sheep in the area at the time. In fact he has been cited, with Gellibrand and Collicot, as having been amongst the 'most humane' of the Tasmanian people in regard to Aboriginal people; he had opposed some of Governor Arthur's measures towards them. (Harcourt, op cit, p.88)

⁷² Brown, *op cit*, p 111.

Aitken was corroborated by an old lubra who, referring to Aitken, had asked whether 'Debbil debbil was dead'. 73

Official records indicate increasing conflict with Aboriginals in 1838, particularly in the Melton region. In April about 40-50 Aboriginals, armed with three guns, went on a raiding tour 'to kill sheep.' Their first call was on John Aitken and his men. Aitken survived a tomahawk attack in a struggle to disarm the Aboriginals of the guns, after which they left for Samuel Jackson's station at Sunbury. Here they speared some sheep, and scattered the remainder with their dogs. A few days later similar 'depredations' took place at Kenneth Clarke's station on the Werribee River; in this case they ate many of the sheep. These men included Bunja Logan, also known as Tullamarine, whose exploits, including escape from the Melbourne jail (where he had been incarcerated for stealing potatoes), were by then notorious amongst the settlers. It was Derrimut and a few other blacks who led to their capture. But between May and June of the same year more Aboriginal pillage, which included the murder of a shepherd in the Mt Macedon area, is said to have culminated in a 45 minute battle in which 7 or 8 Aboriginal men were killed.

As a result of the escalating conflicts, an Aboriginal Protectorate system was introduced in 1839, with GA Robinson as Chief Protector. In March 1840 Robinson travelled across the Shire, roughly replicating Wedge's earlier route down 'Caddens Creek' (after the flockmaster at the adjacent Green Hills station), presumably Toolern Creek. He saw no natives in the Shire, but observed that 'the grass and low scrub was burnt for some distance around' so clearly the local Aboriginal people were still carrying on some of their traditional lifestyle. Nearer to Bacchus Marsh he learnt that the local natives 'were a quiet tribe that assisted the settlers', and who 'remained first with one settler and then another'. Apparently they were happy to work for the squatters, who spoke well of them; 'all they wanted was noorong.'

On 29 February 1840, while living at nearby Jacksons Creek, Assistant Protector ES Parker wrote a report which exhibited an uncommon appreciation of the lifestyle and grievance of the Aboriginal people in the district.

'The very spots most valuable to the Aborigines for their productiveness - the creeks, watercourses and river are the first to be occupied; ... it is common opinion among the settlers that the possession of a squatting licence entitles them with exclusion of the Aborigines from their runs; ... The plain fact is that this is their ordinary place of retreat, as furnishing them with their most abundant supplies of food.'

Parker concluded that they had been:

"...beaten back by the "white man's foot" - to be excluded perforce, from lands which they unquestionably regard as their own property, and from scenes as dear to them as our own native homes to us - despoiled - denied the rights of humanity - classified with and treated as wild dogs - I can entertain no other expectation but that they will

⁷³ Batey, I 'Pioneers of the Sunbury District' (1907), SLV Manuscript, MF 506, pp 16-17.

⁷⁴ Canon, HRV, Vol.2A, op cit, pp. 284-302

⁷⁵ Presland (1994), op cit, p.95

⁷⁶ Presland (1977) op cit, p.38, and Route Map.

⁷⁷ *ibid*, pp.39-40. Other accounts also suggest that the tribe to the west of the Werribee was quiet. For example, WJT Clarke, who settled the Little River area in 1837, said that 'the natives in that part were quiet and well-disposed, but unwilling to work' (Bride, *op cit*, p.278)

be driven to frequent depredations and exposed to more rapid and certain destruction'. ⁷⁸

The major streams, including the Werribee River and Kororoit Creeks provided boundaries between clans and tribal groups, and were often used as travelling routes by the Aboriginal peoples. They were also the places where the squatters had settled.

In addition to reprisals for the stealing of their land, murder of their people and desecration of their ceremonial sites by grazing, there was another reason for the by now consistent attacks by Aboriginal people on stations: they were destitute. The effect of European occupation had devastated their means of subsistence, as their staple vegetable - murnong root - was destroyed by sheep and cattle compressing the formerly light and ashy soil, and as the best watered and sheltered places were so often usurped for station headquarters. As early as June 1839 the settlers in the Sunbury area had noticed: 'the natives are now in much worse condition, and present a far less robust appearance than when they arrived.' The Aboriginals' options were starvation; movement into other areas; trading skins and artefacts; working for the Europeans for food; or stealing provisions.

Within a relatively short time Aboriginal people appear to have been defeated, importunate, and objects of derision. Isaac Batey, who settled near Sunbury in early 1846, could remember only seven occasions on which groups of natives wandered through. Mostly they were few in number; the biggest group comprised more than twenty adults and youths, but young ones were 'conspicuous by their absence'. Only once did he see an infant, in 1851, '...after which not a single wandering aborigine set foot upon our old station'. The baby's father had been killed, thought Batey, by a drunken aboriginal woman. On the Raleigh farm in West Melton, an Aboriginal arrived one night when the husband was away with a bullock team, and set the wood-pile on fire to keep warm. The sight next morning of his warm feet and frosty beard became amusing family lore.

Cameron's memoirs of the area suggest that Staughton's vast, still mainly unfenced, pastoral run provided some sanctuary during these years:

'A tribe of aborigines on the station had as their king 'John Bull' who had a plate with his name on it together with the name of his tribe and he had two lubras. The ... tribe did a lot of brush fencing for the sheep yards and also some divisional fencing.'

Staughton paid them in rations. They later acquired a fatal disease. They buried their king in 'the second paddock from the home station near the creek' amid great demonstrations of grief, and put a fence around the grave:

"...they left flour, sugar, tea, pipe tobacco, soap, towel and tin dish, the reason given being that "when he jump up white fellow, that he could get a feed and a wash".

⁸¹ Jeff Robinson, pers. conv.

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⁷⁸Cannon, M, (ed), *Historical Records of Victoria, Vol 2B, Aborigines and Protectors, 1838-1839*, (VGPO, Melbourne, 1983), pp 692-6

⁷⁹Lakic, M, Wrench, R (eds), Through Their Eyes: An Historical Record of Aboriginal People of Victoria as Documented by Officials of the Port Phillip Protectorate 1839-1841, Museum of Victoria, Melbourne, 1994, p.85.

⁸⁰Batey, *op.cit*. The scarcity of children soon after settlement was widely noted by Europeans. Assistant Protector William Thomas suggested that infanticide was practised increasingly as the Koories came to feel there was no point in having children when they had been deprived of the land (Presland, 1994, *op cit*, p.105). Others also noticed that the Aboriginal people were killing half-caste children at birth (Cannon, HRV, Vol.2A, *op cit*, pp.77, 150)

When each tribe member died they moved to another campsite. Several of the tribe were buried near the creek; these sites were later flooded by the Melton Weir. ⁸² One well-known 'Staughton' Aboriginal, Toby, may have a headstone in the Melton Cemetery. ⁸³

Other large landholders at Toolern Vale were also sympathetic to the Aboriginal people. The Moylan and Browne families, concerned that the pre-existing remains of Aboriginal people be properly respected, independently arranged for them to be interred in the Melton Cemetery. This portion of the cemetery is unmarked.

After many years reports (mainly unconfirmed) of other aspects of the early European relations with Aboriginal people began to surface. In the Sunbury area, a number of Aboriginal women are said to have found shelter in the huts of squatters Malcolm, Headlam and Jackson during the frontier era. At Bacchus Marsh in 1840, GA Robinson noted the many native huts around Caddens Station, and casually reported that 'the natives are enticed about the huts by the men for the sake of the women'. In later years Ned Wedge, a son of the original Port Phillip pioneers, responded to an inquiry as to the reason for the scarcity of Aboriginal people in the Werribee area in the following terms: 'Oh, they all disappeared one night; they stole a bag of flour containing arsenic; their yells could be heard a mile off'. He dissociated his family from the tragedy.

By the early 1860s 'The Central Board to Watch over the Interests of the Aborigines in the Colony of Victoria' had been established. One of its 41 stations for the distribution of stores flour, tea, sugar, soap, tobacco, and blankets - was situated at Bacchus Marsh. The 1866 Report of its supervisor gives some insight into the situation of Aborigines in the area at that time:-

"...in 1864 I distributed blankets to 21 Aborigines. In May and July 1865 I have distributed blankets and rations to 11 Aborigines, 6 males and 5 females.

This year I have received in stores only 15 lbs of tobacco, and I have still a supply of flour, tea, sugar, tobacco and blankets.

None of the Aborigines have been brought up to the police office this year for drunkennesss, and I have noticed only one or two cases of insobriety among them. Their general health seems good, and they are in very good spirits, and satisfied with the rations provided for them. They have assisted this year in digging potatoes, and have been paid in cash and butchers' meat; the latter, they often remind me, should be furnished by the Board, and I certainly think a little of it would be of great service to them.'88

It would appear that the call on the Bacchus Marsh station's provisions by Aborigines may have been in decline. However 'the Bacchus Marsh group' was still in existence in the late 1870s when a photograph was taken of a proud Aboriginal man and his son. Perhaps he was

⁸² Alex Cameron, 'Melton Memoirs' (MDHS typescript), pp.6,7

⁸³ Judith Bilszta, pers. conv. There may be other Aboriginal burials in this grave.

⁸⁴ Batey (1910), op cit, pp.10, 126

⁸⁵ Presland (1977), op cit, p.40

⁸⁶Morris, G, McNaughton, MG, 'Werribee Centenary History', Werribee Banner, 8 February 1962.

⁸⁷ 'Third Report of the Central Board for Aborigines in the Colony of Victoria', *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, 1864, Vol.3.

⁸⁸ 'Fifth Report of the Central Board to Watch over the Interests of the Aborigines in the Colony of Victoria, *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, 1866, Vol.2 (2nd Session).

one of those who in the 1860s made an occasional appearance in Melton, exhibiting their skills in boomerang throwing.⁸⁹

John Chandler remembered:-

'There was a tribe of blacks came to Melton and held a corroboree, and this was the last time I saw a whole tribe together; this was in 1863. Alas! poor things, they are all gone now.'90



Aboriginal man and his son, Bacchus Marsh, 1870s. (Isaac Batey referred to the 'very stately' posture of the Aboriginal people). (Lakic, Through their Eyes, p.89)

Pollitt states that 'the natives finally disappeared from the district shortly after the opening of the Railway Station in 1884', on the banks of the Toolern Creek. Their last Melton camp was on the south side of Ballarat Road about 800 metres east of the Keilor Road junction. This area is now an industrial estate, and archaeological evidence may have been destroyed by road works and site development.

Government policy during this period was to group the people on reserves and missions, breaking ties with tribal areas. Many Port Phillip Aboriginal people went to Coranderrk near Healesville where they established a successful farm, until it dissolved in the wake of a late 1880s ban on non 'full bloods'. ⁹²

⁸⁹ Anders Hjorth, 'Recollections of Melton 1861-67' (typescripty, MDHS)

⁹⁰ Chander, J, (edited Michael Cannon), Forty Years in the Wilderness (Loch Haven, Arthur's Seat, 1990), p.175

⁹¹ Pollitt, JH, An Historical Record of Melton (Melbourne, nd), p.14; J Bilszta, pers. conv.

⁹² Presland (1994), *op cit*, pp.105-107. Some of the local Aboriginals may also have gone to the closer Franklinford Reserve to the north.

CHAPTER THREE: PASTORALISM

Pastoralism is the oldest and most important industry in the history of the Shire. And Melton Shire was significant in the early history of Victoria's pastoral history.

In the wake of the Hume and Hovell and John Batman exploratory tours, the plains between the Maribyrnong and Werribee Rivers became the foundation of a rush for sheep-runs, firstly by Tasmanians 'overstraiters', and then NSW 'overlanders'. The places where the squatters first pitched their tents were invariably where the plains met bands of forest, and watercourses. Some of Victoria's earliest and most notable runs were established in the study area. The 1840s pise homestead at *Exford* is a rare legacy of the pastoral era in this early era, and other early fabric may also remain on stations such as *Green Hills*. Ruins and archaeological evidence of the *Mt Aitken* home-station in the north-eastern corner of the Shire may survive; archaeological remains may also survive at other early pastoral occupations, such as the squatting runs of Watton, Pinkerton, Clarke, Yuille, Hyde, Desailly or even those of Robertson or Pyke. Where still undeveloped the settings of these sites – the creek valley, remnant woodland and grassland – may themselves be evocative of the early pastoral years.

The introduction of freehold land tenure in the 1850s, together with the need for labour efficiencies and security in the gold era, led to property improvements such as fences, woolsheds, sheep washes and dips, and of course, homesteads. The most notable of these were on the holdings of WJT Clarke, the Staughtons, and W. Taylor, who, together with the Chirnsides to the south, were able to dominate the Werribee and Keilor plains area in the freehold era.

From the 1890s the economical and political conditions of pastoralism changed, resulting in the 'break-up' of many of the large estates. The smaller mixed farms that took their place often included sheep pasture, for meat as well as wool.

3.1 The Squatting Era

Other than Batman's flocks at Melbourne, the very first pastoral stations in Port Phillip were established by prominent Association members Charles Swanston, JT Gellibrand and JH Wedge on the lower Werribee River, north of the later township. Other squatters established footholds in the area, and established rough 'stations' and 'outstations', mostly along watercourses. While the 1836 census shows that most settled on the Maribyrnong (between Keilor and Sunbury), Barwon and Moorabool Rivers, probably the most important pioneering sheep-run was John Aitken's *Mt Aitken* station, situated on Kororoit Creek in the far north of the Shire of Melton.⁹³

Aitken had been planning to cross Bass Strait as early as 1833.⁹⁴ On 20 July 1835, the day before Fawkner's *Enterprize* departed to found Melbourne, Aitken left Launceston in the *Endeavour* to prospect the pastures that Batman had reported. His party returned to Launceston on 29 August. On 22 March 1836 Aitken again set sail for Port Phillip, this time to settle. Some 1600 sheep were loaded aboard the brig *Chili*. They ran aground on a sandbank off Arthur's Seat, where the surviving sheep were landed and driven around to the embryonic Yarra settlement. On 6th May Aitken drove the 600 remaining sheep to the uplands between Sunbury and Gisborne where he had decided to settle.

⁹³ Canon, M, Mc Farlane, I (eds), *Historical Records of Victoria, Vol 3*, (VGPO, Melbourne 1984), pp 422-6

⁹⁴Brown, *op cit*, p.92.

One prominent historian of this era observed of Aitken that 'no pioneering enterprise was more useful to Port Phillip.'95 Another, that the improvement of Victoria's merino sheep up to the 1860's owed more to Aitken than to any other sheep breeder. 96 In addition to the carefully selected pure Merino flock he brought from Tasmania in 1836, over the next two decades he paid up to £250 for imported rams, and crossed Merinos with Leicesters as part of a successful breeding plan. He lengthened the wool staple, increasing the weight of fleece while retaining its fineness. 97 Aitken extended his network of pastoral leases in the area, from Jacksons Creek near Gisborne to Skeleton Creek at Tarneit, apparently with a view to moving his flocks during droughts. 98 For several decades Aitken was revered as the colony's leading flockmaster.

His *Mt Aitken* station has also been described as Victoria's '...first inland occupation of sheep country.' ⁹⁹ It subsequently became a starting point from which newly arrived squatters set out to explore the country. ¹⁰⁰ Whilst Aitken may have headed other squatters in this area by only a month or two, it is noteworthy that he had chosen the headwaters of Kororoit Creek as the pick of the Port Phillip sheep country. His confidence in taking to the wilds by himself, at a time when other squatters were clustering together for security, may also have contributed to his confrontations with the natives.

While it was clearly an area of excellent pasture, other factors may also have played a part in Aitken's selection of his site. One of these was the lingering uncertainty regarding the status of the Port Phillip Association's claim to the land. As far as can be estimated from the Association's apparently deliberately vague maps, it would appear that the eastern part of the Shire was assigned to Messrs Gellibrand, Collicott, Cotterell, and Sams. While Sams appears to have been the only one to have attempted to establish a flock on his section (at Sunbury), the claim still created uncertainty. Until about mid 1836 many newly arrived squatters respected the Association's claim. One of these, George Russell, recounted:

'...many of them [squatters] would not settle down on the country which was claimed by the members of this association, but either went beyond their boundaries to settle down or made some arrangement with the reputed owners to be allowed to occupy a portion of their land for a certain time.' 102

The western boundary of the Association's land claim was a north-westerly line from the You Yangs either through or just west of Mt Cottrell, and on to and beyond Mt Kororoit. This would have been the boundary beyond which Aitken and others would feel confident that they could settle without loss in case the Association's title claim was eventually validated by the Government of the United Kingdom. ¹⁰³

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⁹⁵ Sayers, C.E.(ed), Bride, T.F., *Letters From Victorian Pioneers*, facsimile edition (Lloyd O'Neill, Melbourne 1983), p.47.

⁹⁶ PL Brown, in Pike, D (ed.), Australian Dictionary of Biography, (Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1977), Vol. 1,p.4.

⁹⁷ Peel, LJ, *Rural Industry in the Port Phillip Region, 1835-1880*, (MUP, Melbourne, 1974), p.30 ⁹⁸ Spreadborough and Anderson, *op cit*, Map.

⁹⁹Boys, *op cit.* p.49; Anderson, H. (ed.), Gurner, H.F., *Chronicle of Port Phillip*, (Red Rooster, Melbourne, 1978), p.30.

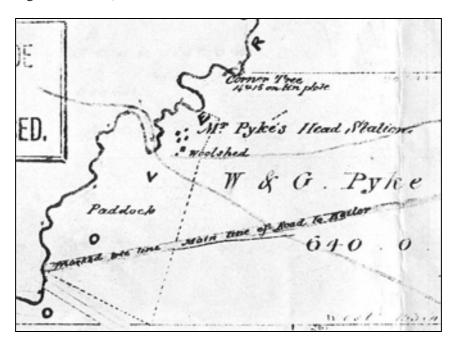
Eg, T Learmonth, WC Yuille, and A Anderson (in Brown, op cit, pp.97, 128, 162).

Duncan, *op cit*, *passim*. JH Wedge may have qualified for the most southern portion of the area in the final map, entitled 'Wedge and Others'. (In mid 1838 Cottrell sold his PPA shares to Swanston, Harcourt *op cit*, p.208)

¹⁰² Russell, op cit, , pp 95-96

¹⁰³Duncan, op cit, passim.

The 1841 census is one of the earliest records available in the area. Travelling north from Werribee, the census recorder came first to John Watton's station, his 'address' given as 'Djerriwha... Weerabin'. [?] Simon Staughton purchased the Brisbane Ranges-Exford run from Watton shortly afterwards. Of the 10 adults who were living and working at his station, 5 were shepherds, so this was clearly a substantial enterprise. Aitken's station, with 16 adults, including 8 shepherds, was larger again. By far the largest was the station run by 'Simeon Cadden for John Patterson', on 'Pennyroyal Creek' (the *Green Hills* station) that supported 22 adults, including 15 shepherds. The other site that can definitely be linked to the Melton Shire was that of William Pyke, also on Pennyroyal Creek, on which there were 5 adults (no children), of whom only one was a shepherd. Three occupiers were listed as proprietors, business or professional people. (This was the run of the Pyke siblings including Dr William, George, and Oliver, who had settled in 1838 on a run abandoned as 'useless' by several previous squatters. It was situated at Melton; the surrounding area was named 'Pykes Plains' during the 1850s. 106)



Portion of Lands Victoria Map K71 (b2), 1852, showing the buildings on Pykes head station. Such maps may help identify archaeological fabric from the first settlement era of the Shire and Port Phillip.

The principal dwellings at these stations were all listed as being constructed of 'wood'. Early surveyors', pastoral-run and some other historical plans show the exact sites of these stations, and perhaps also the arrangement of their buildings, yards, gardens etc. These sites may retain archaeological fabric, ruins, or perhaps buildings that are later extensions of an early hut. A number of stone hearths remain near the locations of places shown as 'outstations' on the *Greenhills* estate. Another small cottage on Blackhill Road (Place No.61) is reputed to have been a shepherd's cottage. The Rockbank Inn ruin, now included in the Victorian Heritage Register, was the site of the original Yuille (then Clarke) *Rockbank* station. On Kororoit Creek in the developing Burnside development is a site marked on early maps as Yuille's woolshed that until recently retained the remains of an early hut (and probably still retains archaeological evidence).

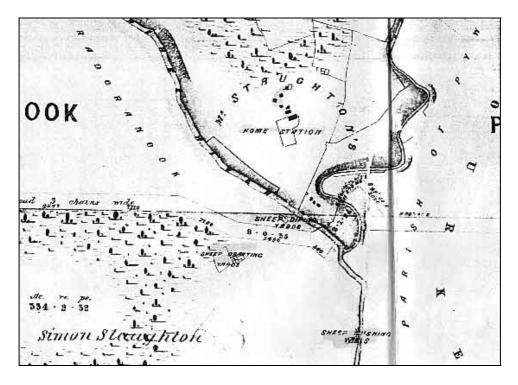
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¹⁰⁴ 1841 Census, New South Wales (Port Phillip District).

¹⁰⁵ He is also referred to as a Doctor 'Dr John Whatton' (Notes, Melton District Historical Society [by Gail Chambers?]), and in Starr, J, *Melton: Plains of Promise* (Melton Shire Council, nd), p.87 ¹⁰⁶ Sayers, Bride, *op cit*, pp.115-116; 'Notices-Missing Stock' (MDHS copy of notice 28/4/1854)

The pastoral advance proceeded with manic rapidity. Other squatters also moved into the area during the 1840s. James Pinkerton settled first on Kororoit Creek before taking over John Sherwin's property on the Werribee (*Yaloak / Yaloke / Yalloch -* later *Surbiton Park*). In the frantic early years, when many squatters rushed to claim bigger, better and more secure holdings, there was considerable turnover of runs. Amongst those squatters who came and went quickly might be included Deat, James Sceales (or 'Scales' as it was commonly spelt, on the Kororoit Creek 'Chain of Ponds' next to Pinkerton), and Desailly. Transient squatters left primitive huts for the next occupant; Pyke and Staughton for example found vacated huts when they first settled on their runs. On a rare occasion such a place might enter the broader historical record: a shepherd's hut on James Robertson's run was the scene of a notorious murder in 1849.



'Plan of Mr Staughton's Home Station and Adjoining Lands, 1854', shows various station facilities, of which there may be some archaeological evidence. (Lands Victoria P/A M175)

The turnover of property was even more acute as a result of the critical 1841-43 pastoral depression, which 'convulsed squatter society'. Green Hills station exemplifies this. John Hunter Patterson 'finding the country almost totally unoccupied' established the station in early December 1836. It was extensive – one outstation was situated at Bacchus Marsh. In 1841 Patterson was forced by the financial crisis to sell or lease all his extensive pastoral holdings. At the same time George Hyde is recorded as the occupier of *Green Hills*. In 1843 Patterson was ruined, and as occurred regularly, pioneer squatter insolvencies provided opportunities for latecomers to acquire runs cheaply (and then monopolise watercourses when

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¹⁰⁷ Eg, Spreadborough and Anderson, *op cit*; J Arrowsmith 'Map of the Province of Victoria, principally derived from the surveys of surveyor Robert Hoddle' (1853); 'Map of Port Phillip, compiled by Mr. Hoddle, 1840' (*CPO Roll Plan 113*,); Parish Plan, Parish of Pywheitjorrk. [Note: I am assuming that the G.Sherwin who purchased the property there was related to or the same person as the J.Sherwin who appears in earlier records.]

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*; also Garryowen (E. Finn), *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne*, (Fergussen and Mitchell, 1888), pp.392-393

¹⁰⁹ Lack, Ford, op cit, p.17

in the Crown land sales). 110 His creditors included the Clyde Company, of which J&A Dennistoun, the great Glasgow pastoral agent and finance company, was a major shareholder. It is possibly as the result of a settlement with Patterson that the names J&A Dennistoun then appear on maps in association with Green Hills. The name Bell (probably WM Bell, agent for Messrs. Dennistoun & Co.) also appears in association with the 48,000 acres property during this period. 111 Later, at the time of Crown sale, G. Urquhart purchased the Green Hills homestation as well as a number of sections abutting the homestation (the Gap Hill Station¹¹²). Green Hills would appear to have been a well-known early Victorian pastoral property. ¹¹⁴

It is of interest that one of the early squatters in the area, George Hyde, was a New South Wales overlander. An Argus article of 1945 suggested that the northern part of the study area was of pre-eminent significance in the early pastoral history of Victoria as the meeting of the two streams of European settlement of Port Phillip. While Aitken, Evans, Jackson and other 'overstraiters' ventured northwards from Williamstown, 'overlander' parties from NSW, such as Howey, Coghill, Riddell and Hamilton, penetrated southward; the two streams meeting among the hills between Sunbury and Gisborne. Thus, declared the writer, 'these hills take pride of place in the pastoral and agricultural development of the State ..., 115

Isaac Batey provides a good insight into the primitive 'sod' and 'wattle and dab' dwellings that were often erected in the district by the early squatters. For example, Jackson's dwelling, in adjacent Sunbury, was:

"...built of pizey (sic), that is to say of clay laid down in a contrivance resembling a brick mould on a large scale. When a course of the tempered material set the mould was removed and others added. The walls were very thick, nicely finished, his livingroom canvas-oiled, the store not, and there was a wattle and dab skillion used as a sleeping apartment. Times considered it was a comfortable residence for a single It was white-washed inside and out and as its paling roof projected considerably the walls in great measure were protected against the rain. His kitchen, a two-roomed structure was according to the times some distance from the house.¹¹⁶

The much grander Exford in Melton was also of pise construction. Melton's Strathtulloh homestead also contains some interesting primitive construction techniques. Flourbags, bullock-hides, and eelskins served as doors, hinges and fastenings on the Page's early Glencoe hut:

¹¹⁰ ibid, pp.18-19. Lack and Ford also refer to 'Dr John Walton' (usually spelt Watton), whose run was purchased by Simon Staughton. Staughton 'snapped up runs at the Brisbane Ranges, Exford, Mooradooranook, Mouyong, Djerriwarrh, Mt Cotterill, Pywheitjorrk and Pyke's Creek, thus laying the foundation of his prodigious Exford estate.'

¹¹¹ Spreadborough & Anderson, op cit; also Clarke, M, 'Big' Clarke (Queensberry Hill Press, Melbourne, 1980), p.108; also, untitled MDHS typescript refers to 'Bells and Buchanan' in the 1848 Census; Starr, *op cit*, pp.76-78 ¹¹² Cameron, *op cit*, p.23

^{113 &#}x27;Old Melton Times', (MDHS typescript, author unknown, reproduced from the Melton Express

¹¹⁴ A number of those who established runs in the Western District, at Mount Emu near Caramut (at which there was a much larger pastoral run called *Green Hills No.1*), would also appear to have had early association with Green Hills at Toolern in some way. That is, Cadden, Hyde, (and maybe Bell), and (later) possibly Urquhart. (Sayers, Bride, op cit, pp.281-282, 290-291, 289-299; Brown, op cit, p.172)
¹¹⁵The Argus, 14/7/1945

¹¹⁶ Batey (1910), op.cit., p.13.

'The sole furniture consisted of stools, the table was of roughly trimmed planks. The floor was earthen. Rude as these structures were they were really comfortable quarters for a brace of bachelors.'117

The first Pinkerton dwelling on Kororoit Creek (1845-48), being a family home, was more comfortable. It was: 'made of wattle and daub with hessian. Some of the better rooms were lined with green baize.'



Yuille's Rockbank Station Lease (Lands Victoria, 'Run Plan 114')

As much of the study area remains rural, it is possible that some early sites that have not been ploughed may still retain some evidence of early occupation. Any archaeological evidence which might be found of this first 'sod hut' phase of Port Phillip, and particularly of prominent figures associated with it, would be important to the heritage of Victoria. It would also greatly complement *Exford* and the other important pastoral heritage sites of the Shire.

The Shire also appears to have an exceptional number of 'private' graves, pre-dating and isolated from official cemeteries, some of which date to the early pastoral days (including the Pyke, Pinkerton and Staughton families). These constitute rare and important heritage from this era.

The names of streets, including Yuille, Pyke, Pinkerton and Aitken Streets, in townships such as Melton and The Gap also commemorate this early phase of the Shire's European history.

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¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp.119-120.



The graves of Melton's first European settlers, George and William Pyke.

Today situated in the Melton Golf Links. (M&DHS)

3.2 Freehold: Pastoralism in the Late Nineteenth Century

During the 1850s most of the land in the Shire of Melton was sold by the Crown. The change of land tenure exposed those without the capital that was now required to retain their pastures. But those with accumulated capital could acquire much larger areas once freehold became available. As a result three owners - Clarke, the Chirnsides, and Staughton - soon dominated the Port Phillip district. 119

Simon Staughton and WJT Clarke were by far the largest landowners in the Melton Shire. Staughton was fortunate in that he had arrived, cashed-up, at Port Phillip during the depression, and purchased the Brisbane Ranges and Exford pastoral lease and stock at favourable prices. He prospered and so was able to start purchasing the freehold to his land as soon as it came up for sale. By the time of his death in 1863 the *Exford* estate was said to be approximately 100,000 acres in extent. His freehold now included land to the east of the Werribee River. At his death, this property was divided between his four sons. As well as the home station *Exford*, two of these new estates were situated in the Shire of Melton: *Eynesbury*, and *Brooklyn/Nerowie*. (The other, *Staughton Vale*, is situated well west of the Shire.)

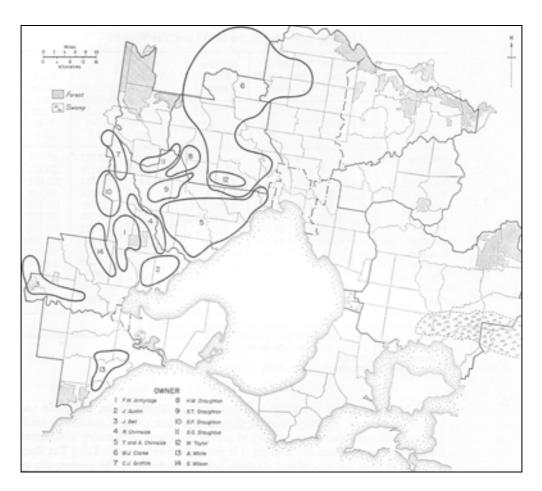
On 24 August 1850 WJT ('Big') Clarke threw the administration of Port Phillip into turmoil by applying to purchase 20,000 acres of Sunbury land under a previously unused provision of an 1842 Imperial Land Act. Despite strong public condemnation, especially by local squatters (including *Rockbank's* WC Yuille) he succeeded in purchasing 31,317 acres of this prime land. Together with his additional entitlement to three times that area of adjoining land in 'grass-right', this 'spelt disaster' to the Bateys of *Redstone Hill*, and all Clarkes' new neighbours. It came on top of the unparalleled drought of 1850, and then the 'Black Thursday' fires on 6th February 1851.

¹¹⁸ Peel, *op.cit.*, pp.56,133.

¹¹⁹ Peel, *op.cit.*, pp.129-131.

¹²⁰ Peel, *op.cit.*, p.61.

¹²¹ Clarke (1980), op cit, pp.103-5; Batey, op.cit., p.4.



Approximate location of freehold estates exceeding 4,000 hectares in 1880. In the Melton Shire, the owner of parcel No.6 is WJ Clarke, of Nos. 8, 9, 11 are the Staughtons, and No.12 is W Taylor. (Peel, Rural Industry in the Port Phillip Region, p.130).

Although not completely absorbed, John Aitken's station was one to lose heavily. But he also held other runs, so while his expansion was curtailed he was not affected too seriously. He was able to retain his homestead section and to purchase other nearby Crown allotments, such that the *Mt Aitken* run was said to consist of 4000 acres freehold by the time he went to Scotland in 1858. He died shortly after this trip, but the property stayed in the family for many years after, its stock known Australia-wide under Henry Beattie's management during the late nineteenth century. 122

Clarke's grass-right entitlement didn't last long. Most of this land came up for auction over the next few years, and the local small pastoralists had the opportunity to re-establish themselves. However, although the squatters had fought for years to obtain security of tenure to their leased runs, many could not afford to purchase them when they were offered for sale. The reduced holdings they acquired were often too small to graze profitably.

James Pinkerton exemplifies their fate. While not affected by the Special Survey itself, Pinkerton fell victim to Clarke's massive auxiliary purchases of Crown land during the 1850s. Although Pinkerton purchased his pre-emptive right to his 640 acre home station, the 'grass right' to Clarke's freehold land initially absorbed much of his run. Pinkerton then leased out

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¹²² Holden Parish Plan; Peel, *op cit*, p.55; Dixon, HP, 'Early Settlement of the Gisborne 'Bush Inn' District, 1802 to the Gold Rushes' (typescript, 1981), pp.3-4

grazing country from Clarke. But according to Isaac Batey, an outbreak of scab, and falling prices as the boom eased towards the end of the 1850s meant he was unable to afford Clarke's high rental, and was eventually ruined. Presumably the Pykes' station faced similar pressures, compounded in that case by the deaths of William Pyke in 1850, and George Pyke in 1855. 124



Rockbank Woolshed (c.1860s/70s) prior to repair. (M&DHS)

At Crown land sales Clarke purchased both vast tracts of plains land (around Mt Cotterell and Rockbank, down to Truganina), and also much smaller and more strategically located pockets along Kororoit Creek. Over the next 20 years he vigorously bought up small farms whose owners had fallen on hard times. ¹²⁵ For example, Clarke was only partly successful in buying the good land adjoining the Kororoit Creek described in 1854 as 'chiefly rich black soil ... excellently adapted for farming' (the adjacent plains were described as stony and 'totally unfit for farming') at the Crown sales, but by 1892 he owned the lot (with the exception of a few sections owned by Taylor). ¹²⁶ Prominent Melton citizen William Montgomery JP was one Kororoit Creek grazier who sold up to Clarke and went to New Zealand (his bluestone building on a bend of the creek does not survive). ¹²⁷ Clarke eventually owned a vast arc of properties stretching from Tarneit through Rockbank, Sunbury and on to Bolinda Vale and Merriang. ¹²⁸

There were challenges to the pastoralists by the farmers of the area, over closed roads, and sometime in Council elections. ¹²⁹ In the 1870s a journalist visiting the area wrote of the:

¹²³ Peel, *op cit*, pp.55-56.

¹²⁴ Sayers, Bride, *op cit*, pp.114-115

Peel, op cit; Cameron, op cit, p.16

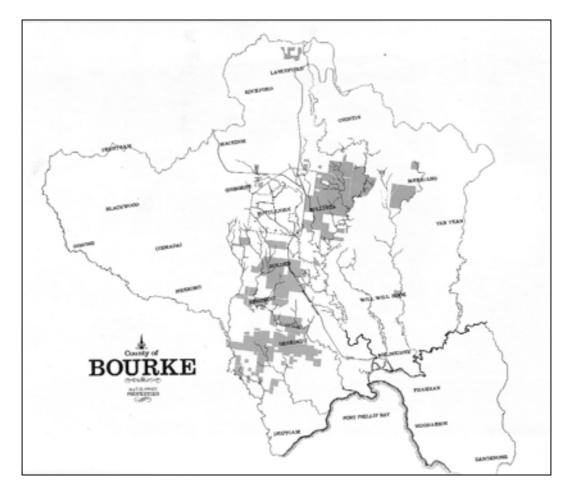
¹²⁶ SLV Houghton, Plan I 29 (15/5/1854); Parish Plan: Kororoit; 'Shire Map Series' plans, SLV, 821.1A (1892)

¹²⁷ Cameron, op cit, p.6

¹²⁸ Clarke (1980), op cit, opposite p.247

¹²⁹ Olwen Ford, 'Rural Activity in Melbourne's West, 1851-1880' (Appendix 2A, Melbourne's Western Region Historical Outline, Melbourne's Living Museum of the West, Melbourne Western Region Commission, Draft Only, nd), p.5

"... the immense estates of Messrs Chirnside, WJ Clarke and Staughton, the absence of roads, houses or life of any kind ... which gives an air of stillness and desolation to the scene.'130



WJT Clarke's Properties in the County of Bourke. (M Clarke, 'Big' Clarke, opp.p.247)

But Melton and Braybrook Shire ratebooks and other sources show that small farmers leased some of Clarke's better land to increase their holdings. For example, an 1877 lease of Kororoit Creek land by Sir WJ Clarke to Mary Tarleton allows for the land to be used for 'grazing purposes only', with the farmer not 'keep any sheep' or 'break up or cultivate' the premises. 131

Clarke established a separately managed grazing property based upon Yuille's Rockbank preemptive right. (He moved its homestation from the site of the present Rockbank Inn ruin to the present-day *Deanside* property.) Unlike other properties in the area (eg, *Rupertswood*, Red Rock, Bollinda Vale) Rockbank remained under WJT Clarke's personal control, and he regularly visited it. The grass on the Keilor plains was sweet, and the property specialised in fattening wethers and barren ewes for the Newmarket sales. 132

¹³⁰ Bacchus Marsh Express, 28/101876

¹³¹ Eg, see Lease agreement, WJ Clarke of Sunbury to Mary Tarleton, 27/4/1877 (M&DHS). ¹³² Cameron, *op cit*, p.16; Clarke (1980), *op cit*, p.241



Sir WJ Clarke (son of WJT Clarke), Masonic Grand Master

Apart from Clarke and Staughton, there were others who were able to establish large and viable pastoral holdings in the area. The other large property near Melton was the *Green Hills* station at Toolern Vale (owned by Browne towards the end of the century), part of which was subdivided in the late nineteenth century to become Patterson's *Melton Park*. This, with the Staughton and Clarke empires, was undoubtedly the other pastoral property that Anders Hjorth had in mind when he observed that, in the 1860s 'the village was surrounded by large pastoral estates on three sides.' In addition to the Mount Aitken station of approximately 4000 acres, the other major landowner on the plains was William Taylor, whose 10,000 acre *Overnewton* estate at Keilor included much of the area between Mt Kororoit and Sydenham. Other properties associated with this pastoral era contain heritage places include *Surbiton Park* and *Strathtulloh*.

Places Associated with Nineteenth Century Pastoralism

Homesteads and Outbuildings

New and extended homesteads on these properties expressed the profitability of the pastoral industry in this era. The Staughton families engaged architects to design elegant new homesteads - *Eynesbury*, and *Brooklyn* - with impressive outbuildings and ornamental gardens. Other substantial homesteads - *Pinewood*, *Glencoe*, *Rocklands* (on Mt Aitken Road) and *Glen Elgin* - are examples of small pastoral properties from a later period (1850s - 70s).

¹³³ Hjorth, *op cit*. Also, MDHS (1905 Melton Express), *op cit*, which refers to these three stations, plus Taylor's *Overnewton* Estate.



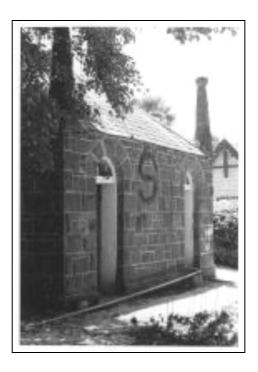
Eynesbury Homestead, 1965. (John T Collins, State Library of Victoria)

Strathtulloh was perhaps the earliest freehold property in the Shire. While its fine bluestone house dates from the 1860s, another nearby stone building (used as a kitchen at one stage) likely predates this, and on the creek flat there are the ruins of a once substantial rubble bluestone building that probably dates to the 1840s. This is reputed to have been associated either with 'Dr Cotterell' or 'Dr Watton'. However an 1850 map of the district marks it as 'Bryan's outstation'. Being substantial, the ruin may have previously been the headstation of an earlier pastoralist such as Watton.



Exford, Melton, 1968 (John T Collins, National Trust)

 $^{^{134}}$ Lands Victoria, Map 'Sydney M3 (Malcolm, 1850). According to Starr, *op cit*, p.86, Bryan took up the station in 1848.



Exford, Bluestone Pinnacles, 1968 (John T Collins, State Library of Victoria)

From the earliest times, some of the larger pastoralists such as Aitken, and Hyde used their Melton runs as bases from which to manage additional inland stations. In the 1840s William Taylor at *Overnewton* in Keilor, and perhaps 'Simon of Exford' also established their homesteads as local Manors, country estates accessible to their city business and political interests. Perhaps they set the scene for others in the region, including the builders of Victoria's two greatest rural mansions – the Chirnsides' *Werribee Park* and Sir WJ Clarke's *Rupertswood* - for whom the region, at the eastern extremity of Victoria's great pastoral plains, and near the city, was a convenient base from which to carry on both pastoral empires and metropolitan business and social life. Other pastoral homesteads in the basalt plains adjacent to Melbourne may also fit this pattern, including Samuel Staughton's *Eynesbury*, Brownes *Green Hills*, Walter Clark's *Glenara*, FR Godfrey's *Mt Ridley*, Molesworth Greene's *Greystones*, WP Greene's *Woodlands*, and G Coghill's *Cumberland*. Numerous other up-country pastoralists also purchased holding property on which to fatten stock bound for Newmarket.

Apart from the homesteads, there were other buildings and works. The outbuildings of the pastoral stations are important reminders of the large seasonal workforce required in the sheep and wool industry. Striking improvements in the way of stone guest cottages, worker's accommodation, a woolshed (now on Warrawong, Place No.272), barns and other outbuildings were made at *Exford*. Big improvements occurred at *Rockbank* from the 1860s, including the superb woolshed, stone dams, and extensive drainage works.

¹³⁵ Small squatters also appreciated the town being within riding distance. Amongst the revellers at the Separation Fancy Dress Ball was a Mr Pinkerton 'as Hamish' (Garryowen, *op cit*, p.920). Usually young bachelors, they often took to sprees in the town, the only difference between them and their men being that they drank brandy while the men drank rum according to I Batey.

Dry Stone Walls

Fences were a huge capital investment for which there was motivation once freehold was obtained. Shepherds had originally been employed to protect the sheep within the estates, but with the gold-rush labour shortage the move to enclose property boundaries became critical. While there were few (comparative to farm properties) fences and wall erected inside the sheep stations, long dry stone walls were erected to create huge paddocks on the Clarkes land in the southern part of the Shire. Stock mustering yards were also erected.

Research indicates that the Clarkes (WJT Clarke, Sir WJ Clarke, and Sir RTH Clarke) built nearly half of the drystone walls that remain in the Shire. Of a total of over 165 kilometres of drystone walls in Melton Shire (identified in the Shire of Melton Dry Stone Walls study), some 74 km, or 45%, appear to have been built as part of the Clarkes' vast *Rockbank* Estate. Some of the more prominent of these are situated on Faulkners Road, Plumpton Road (the 'Mile Wall'), and the c.3 square mile paddock to the south-east of Mt Cottrell.

There are almost no dry stone walls remaining that were associated with the Staughton or William Taylor pastoral estates. The Staughtons to the west of the Werribee River built comparatively few, and there is evidence that most of these were removed in the late nineteenth century. A few remain. Taylor appears to have built a modest number of dry stone walls, but only a few on the north side of the Melton Highway remain.

A few Staughton's distinctive timber fence posts, surmounted by a carved orb, remain on the Eynesbury station today.

Watering Stock

A major, distinctive, and perhaps unique (in Victoria) legacy of this pastoral era in Melton Shire are the dry stone wall dams that were built, most notably on the Clarke estate. They express the need for a permanent water supply within 3 or 4 miles of sheep pastures, and the major role of the *Rockbank* station in fattening sheep for the Newmarket saleyard.

Pastoralists' first 'permanent improvements' after obtaining security of tenure consisted of erecting fences and sinking waterholes. Provision of water was particularly problematic in the study area, as the Shire of Melton plains are situated in a rainshadow with a significantly lower rainfall than the rest of the Port Phillip region.

The excavation of large 'tanks' (dams in paddocks or across 'dry' gullies rather than on watercourses) only began to come into general use on pastoral properties in the 1870s. ¹³⁷ It is possible that the Clarke dams pre-dated this later solution. However the excavation of 'tanks' in Melton's plains districts would have been particularly difficult, if not impossible in many places, due to the very shallow basalt bedrock of much of the area. Unable to dig deep 'tanks' in the earth, the Clarke solution seems

¹³⁶ Peel, *op cit*, pp.108-109; also Brown, PL (ed), *The Narrative of George Russell of Golf Hill* (OUP, London, 1935), pp.373-374

¹³⁷ Hughes, Trueman, Ludlow, 'Wells and Underground Tanks', prepared for the Heritage Council of NSW (nd), pp.25-28; also Albrecht, CE, *Measurments and Drawings of Tanks and Dams*, Melbourne, Arnell & Jackson, [1885?]

to have been to construct earthen dams across depressions and gullies of the district, probably built with the shallow topsoil (likely scooped-up with the aid of horses or bullocks¹³⁸), which were then faced with a dry stone wall, built to different degrees of craftmanship. Hence a series of at least four earthen dams with dry stone wall faces was built across the Clarke estate, mainly in the north around Diggers Rest, but also at the Rockbank headstation. (Two others may have been built on Clarke property outside of the Shire, one at Balliang¹³⁹, and another south of Doherty's Road.)



The usual type of rural tank excavation in the nineteenth century that was not possible in Melton Shire. Horses with scoops gouge out the soil. (Michael Cannon, *Life in the Country: Australia in the Victorian Age* 2, p.121)

It is possible that idea for and the construction of the dams evolved over years. They could date to 1860s, when the shearing shed was built, or even earlier; it is also possible that they were a part of the capital improvements that are known to have occurred in the late 1870s – early 1880s when Sir WJ Clarke assumed management of Rockbank.

By the late 1880s and 1890s another source of stock water - windmills pumping groundwater - were becoming widespread in rural areas. 140

Many of the dry stone wall dams are threatened by unchecked rabbit burrowing in the earth behind them.

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¹³⁸ In early days pastoral tanks were scooped out manually, with the aid of a plough and wheelbarrow. This was superseded by use of horses, and bullocks for very large tanks such as were built by the Clarkes. Afterwards there was debate about the economy of using steam powered ploughs and scoops, but these never seem to have been extensively used. (Cannon, Michael, *Life in the Country: Australia in the Victorian Age: 2* [Nelson, West Melbourne, 1978], p.221; also A Pepys Wood, 'Tanks and Wells of New South Wales, Water Supply and Irrigation', in *Journal of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, Vol.17, 1883, pp.149-189.)

¹³⁹ Context Pty Ltd, 'Rural Heritage Study, Western Region of Melbourne' (Melbourne Western Region Inc, 1994), p.200.

Hughes et al, op cit, pp.68-70; Pepys Wood, op cit

3.3 The Transformation of Pastoralism in the Twentieth Century

The early twentieth century was a watershed in the history of the Shire of Melton. It saw the subdivision and sale of thousands of acres of the Clarke, Taylor, and Staughton holdings. Smaller estates such as *Melton Park*, *Green Hills*, and James Robertson's *Upper Keilor Estate* were also subdivided and sold at this time.

There were a number of factors contributing to this development. With inventions such as the Babcock tester, the development of local co-operative creameries and butter factories, and advances in refrigeration creating new export markets, dairying in particular suddenly boomed. New overseas markets were also opened up for sheep meat as a result of advances in refrigeration, and the immense impact of fertilisers permitted more intensive use of the land, and smaller holdings.

Financial pressure on large pastoralists had been building from the late nineteenth century, as Victorian radicals introduced death duties (1870), land tax (1877) and income tax (1895). These were augmented by new Commonwealth taxes and duties in the early twentieth century. These had considerable impact in breaking up large estates over a long period, 'particularly during times when rural incomes fell out of balance with the assessable worth of the properties.' The pressure built as a result of the worst drought in Australian history, which began in 1896 and lasted for seven terrible years. When all of William Taylor's (*Overnewton*) pastoral mortgages were discharged after his death in 1903 his estate was found to be in deficit.

There was also direct political pressure on the landholders, some of whom were local parliamentary representatives (Samuel Staughton, and Rupert Clarke) to 'break-up' their huge estates. The view that Staughton's and the other sheep-runs were holding back development was apparently widely held in Melton. 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 ...' 143

As the the 1890s depression deepened popular discontent intensified, with calls for the repurchase of the fertile pastoral lands being wasted as 'sheep walks'. The estates should be subdivided and redistributed as small farms. The 'yeoman ideal' and the wrestle for the land between the rich and the poor was a major theme in Australian history.

In 1897 the new owner of the Clarke empire, Sir Rupert Turner Havelock Clarke Bart. had mused in Parliament about cutting up 40,000 acres of his estate to lease to dairy farmers. He was under some local pressure to make land available for farming, and declared he was keen not to 'disappoint public expectations.' In 1898 the Victorian Municipal Directory entry for Melton Shire made the first of a series of unprecedented reports on movements by big local landholders such as Rupert Clarke, Harry Werribee Staughton, and Harvey Patterson to sell and lease (often under the 'share system') large portions of their estates to small farmers and graziers. ¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Cannon, Life in the Country, op cit, p.145

¹⁴² Eg, A Hjorth, 'Recollections of Melton 1861-67' (M&DHS Newsletter, Feg 2001)

¹⁴³ Cited in Lack, Ford, op cit, p.32

¹⁴⁴Sunbury News: 31/7/1897, 7/8/1897, 4/9/1897.

¹⁴⁵ Victorian Municipal Directory, 1898, and following years.

In August 1905 the Melton *Express* reported on some of these local developments. While at that time the Closer Settlement Board's surveyors were busy partitioning about 4000 acres of Harry Werribee Staughton's *Exford* estate into farms, much of this property was already being farmed under the share system. ¹⁴⁶

The arrival of the railway at Melton South in 1884 had changed the local economy, most notable being the development of the timber cutting industry, wherein the high quality heavy box forest on *Exford* was cut and railed from 'Staughtons Rail Siding' to Melbourne for fuel. ¹⁴⁷ This clearing of timber enabled more land to be ploughed.

For the 'first few seasons', reported the *Express* in 1905, the crops had not turned out so well, 'but latterly the returns have been good, and during the time of the South African War the prices were exceptionally good'. Mr Staughton had also provided eleven dairy farms on his land under the share system, with the farmers providing the 'labour, vehicles and horseflesh', 'Mr Staughton providing the 'farms, houses and cows', the profits being divided. Each tenant had to crop a specified amount of land in order to feed the cows in dry weather, with any surplus being sold and the profit divided. Much more money was made in this intensive farming than when the property was a sheep station. 'Some of these tenants are old servants of Mr Staughton, to whom he had given a helping hand to do for themselves and families growing up.' 148

Whereas the *Exford* station had originally shorn 17-18,000 sheep, in 1905 it had no sheep at all. A large dairy had been built at the homestead and – the ultimate symbol of the change – the shearing shed (now at *Warrawong*) was converted to a dairy. ¹⁴⁹

State legislators fostered the changes. The Closer Settlement Act was a revival of the Selection Acts, and it would be adapted after both the World Wars as Soldier Settler Acts. The Land Act 1898 had established the 'closer settlement' branch of the Lands Department, but it was not until the Closer Settlement Act 1904 that things really got moving. This Act introduced the possibility of compulsory acquisition by the government, and increased five-fold the amount that the Closer Settlement Board could expend on repurchasing land. The scheme commenced operations on 16th January 1905. The Board's second scheme was the repurchase of William Taylor's *Overnewton* in the north and east of Melton Shire in 1905.

By 1907 the surveyors at Exford had done their work and the Board was ready to put the much larger *Exford* estate of Harry Werribee Staughton up for sale. Some 8000 acres, divided into 40 farms, was described as 'well adapted for cereal growing and dairying', with permanent water available from the Werribee River and the Toolern Creek, and the railway line adjacent. The property also contained 'dams and tanks and three bores.' There was a saw mill in full operation, and ample timber for fencing and firewood. State of the Board was ready to put the much larger Exford was a saw with permanent water available from the Werribee River and the Toolern Creek, and the railway line adjacent.

At its larger *Exford* scheme the Closer Settlement Board experimented with new ideas. Here and at Colbinabbin it set aside 5700 acres especially for British immigrants. To prevent the loss of a season while awaiting their arrival, the land was 'put in a productive condition by sowing down 1825 acres at Exford, and fallowing 3947 acres at Colbinabbin.' ¹⁵²

David Moloney

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¹⁴⁶ The Bacchus Marsh *Express*, 19/8/1905

¹⁴⁷ Historical Plan: D/60A (28/2/1841) 'Plan of the Lands in the Werriby [sic] District for sale under the regulations of March 1841'; The *Weekly Times*, 23/3/1907

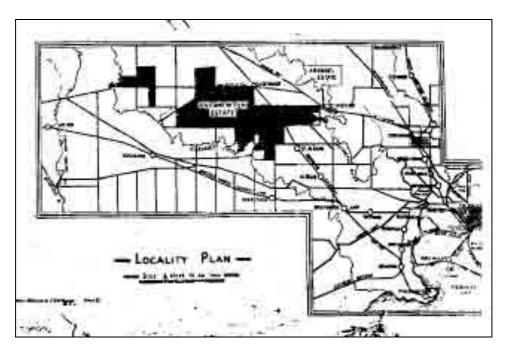
The Bacchus Marsh Express, 19/8/1905

¹⁴⁹ ibid

¹⁵⁰ Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1905, Vol.3(1), 'Report of the Lands Purchase and Management Board'

¹⁵¹ The Weekly Times: 16/3/1907, 23/3/1907

¹⁵² VPP, 1907, Vol.2, pp.175-186



The Closer Settlement Board's Overnewton Estate, which extended from Tullamarine-Keilor to the Kororoit Creek in Melton.

The consequence of the activities of the Closer Settlement Board, and the private sale of Clarkes' Rockbank and other pastoral estates in the first decade of the twentieth century, was the emergence of small mixed farming-grazing properties in the landscape. Numerous small, double-fronted weatherboard farmhouses around the Shire testify to these historic changes, The changes were also evident in townships: saleyards were built in Melton, and stock yards and sidings appeared at Melton South. Apart from the land reservations, no substantial remains of these facilities survive today.



House at 974 Melton Highway, a small farm homestead built c.1906 on the Overnewton Closer Settlement Estate. (Place No.119 in Heritage Study) (David Moloney)

In addition to the mixed farmers, there were in the area smaller pastoralists with fattening paddocks for Newmarket, or who had developed stud herds and flocks. For example, in c.1940 Rogerson Bullen had 'several fine fattening properties down the Goulburn Valley and in the Melton and Deer Park districts he also breeds and fattens large numbers of stock himself.' Many other Melton Shire identities, such as Henry Beattie, J. Cockbill and Sons, Digby Tarleton, Bob Watson, Jimmy Campbell and Harry Minns were also prominent in the Melbourne meat market in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the mid twentieth century the large meat supply companies of Gilbertons, and Angliss owned fattening properties in the Shire.

¹⁵³ Peck, HH, Memoirs of a Stockman (Stock and Land, Melbourne, 1972), p.70.

¹⁵⁴ ibid, passim

CHAPTER FOUR: FARMING

Its dry climate has made Melton a famous hay producing district, while cereal crops, dairying, and stock studs have also been important. The farming era in Melton began with the subdivision and sale of Crown land in the gold-induced agricultural boom of the 1850s. Small farming declined in the area from the early 1860s - the result of changing market conditions, a succession of crop and stock diseases, crippling droughts, and new farming opportunities inland. Many desperate tenant farmers left the land during this period, and many freeholders sold-out to their pastoral neighbours. Grazing reasserted itself.

The population exodus appears to have moderated somewhat as a result of further sales of 'waste' Crown lands in the 1860s and 70s under the Selection Acts. The 'Novel Industry' provisions Land Acts of this time were also responsible for the establishment of a number of important vineyards on the Sunbury side of Calder Highway, which was at that time part of the Shire of Melton.

Around the turn of the century developments in farming science, technologies, fertiliser, transport and markets, saw a major revival of farming in Victoria, especially in dairying. The break-up of much of the Clarke, Staughton, Taylor and other pastoral estates in the early twentieth century was a key to this revival in Melton.

As the land was settled farmers became unwitting players in a painful process of adaptation of European practices to the local environment. They continued to learn about local climate patterns, exhaustion of soils after a few crops, diseases and pests, and to evolve appropriate, viable practices. The stories of their past successes and failures are frequently written in the landscape, for example in remnant early cottages, homestead plantings, and stone fences. Eucalyptus and cypress shelter belt planting around self-contained farm complexes tell of the vital new dairy, cropping and grazing enterprises that were launched in the early twentieth century.

Potentially significant farming heritage sites will include homesteads, stone fences, workers dwellings, stables, haybarns, milking sheds and dairies, and then early twentieth century shelter plantations and small shearing sheds. In the wider landscape, the hallmark of a farming era is the presence (or remnants) of a small church or school, and perhaps a hall or small rural hotel.

There have been a number of different farming eras in the Shire.

The 1850s

In the 1840s the study area was occupied by sheep. Grazing and cropping activities in Port Phillip in the 1830s and 40 had been separate enterprises, with most of the cropping carried out north of the Yarra River and east of Sydney Road. On the plains to the west of Sydney Road sheep grazing predominated. Although 640 acre allotments had been sold for farms in the 1840s in the nearby Tullamarine and Bulla parishes, there were no communities of tenant farmers established in the Melton area in this period.

The gold rushes changed all that. Initially the demand was for food; then unsuccessful or former diggers needed land. From the first sale in 1852 (ominously, to WJT Clarke), and especially in 1854-55, much of the study area was sold by the Crown, and the farming period commenced. The township areas and the Yangardook foothills (Toolern Vale) were quickly

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¹⁵⁵ Peel, *op cit*, pp.19-20

purchased. Mixed farming allotments supplied vegetables, dairy produce, poultry and pigs to passing travellers. Several small farmers carried the district's produce to the goldfields. ¹⁵⁶

In the 1850s the Government sold lots in smaller parcels, enabling people of lesser means to achieve the great immigrant dream of land ownership. Those who had arrived prior to the gold-rush, or those few who had enjoyed a little success at the diggings or as carriers to them, were best placed to succeed at the farming life. Thus, for example, Beaty, Chandler, Hjorth and Newnham put down roots in the Melton district.¹⁵⁷

The establishment of the Melton Agricultural Society signifies these momentous changes. Whilst Melton was a relative latecomer to agriculture, and still very small, by at least 1858 (when the first ploughing match was held) it had established 'a well run' Agricultural Society. Government records show that the Melton Society was one of only 22 Agricultural Societies in Victoria by the end of the decade. Although a very small Society, by virtue of its having been one of the earliest formed, it was entitled to annual government grants proportionate to its revenue. As a result it was able to offer prizes for the whole range of agricultural activity; in the early years by far the largest prizes went to the category 'Horse Stock'. In his memoirs Alex Cameron remembered the fine exhibitions of draught horses from surrounding districts, cattle, sheep pigs, poultry dairy produce and vegetables.

Yangardook (or Green Hills, later Toolern Vale) was the jewell in the district's agricultural crown. Its reputation was established by the early 1860s, at which time it is regularly cited in agricultural statistics and reports. For the 1862-63 season Yangardook had the highest yield for barley (of 26.5 bushels per acre) in the West Bourke district. James Scott, the agricultural inspector that year, noted that:-

'Yangardook leads with barley, and I must say the farmers in this parish display great judgement and anxiety in endeavouring to excel each other in growing cereals; you may always depend on seeing some one of them at the agricultural shows. Five or six of them have got medals from the London Exhibition of 1862 for their produces; they were greatly rejoiced that it was from this parish the wheat came that the Canadian gentleman had surreptitiously obtained and was showing off, when it was detected by Mr Knight.' ¹⁶¹

Samuel Kitson, on Toolern Road, is said by one early source to have taken first prize for wheat at London's Crystal Palace Exhibition. He also won the 'Governors Cup for the best

¹⁶¹ ibid

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¹⁵⁶ Bilszta, J, 'The Pastoral and Agricultural Foundations in the Melton District: The First Forty Years' (MDHS) Also her lists of crown land purchasers.

¹⁵⁷ 'Pastoral and Agricultural Foundations', *op cit*; Some others goldfields diggers, tradesmen and carriers who became farmers in the district include James McPherson, John Cropley (*Rockbank Farm*, Derrimut), William Benson, (Couangalt), Samuel McCorkell, (Couangalt); see Sutherland, A. *Victoria and Its Metropolis: Past and Present*, (McCarron Bird, Melbourne, 1888), pp. 419-439.

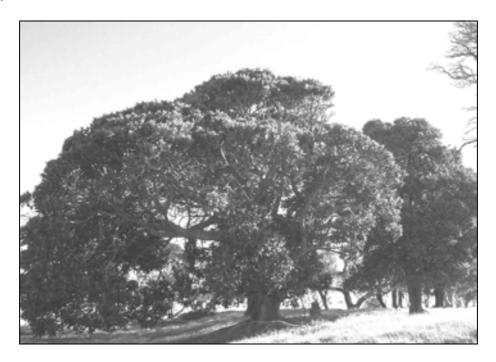
¹⁵⁸ Alex Cameron 'Melton Memoirs' (MDHS), p.1; Pollitt, JH, *An Historical Record of Melton*

Alex Cameron 'Melton Memoirs' (MDHS), p.1; Pollitt, JH, *An Historical Record of Melton* (Melbourne, nd), pp.54-55

Note of the Board of Agriculture', p.15. (As the number of agricultural societies increased to 33 over the next few years, stricter guidelines were established that would have disqualified the Melton Society from entitlement to funds had they been in operation earlier. For example, no new society was able to be within 20 miles of an existing one; Bacchus Marsh also had a society.)

¹⁶⁰ Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1864, Vol.2, 'Reports of Collectors of Agricultural Statistics: District of West Bourke', p.94 The West Bourke district included notable farming areas such as Lancefield, Bacchus Marsh and Gisborne.

field of hay grown in Victoria, his crop being as high as the fence and as level as a billiard table. 162



Site of Samuel Kitson's homestead Brookfield on the banks of Toolern Creek. Typically of early dwellings, it established on a waterway. The exotic trees (unusual in Melton, a result of their position beside a stream), and the remains of half-underground stone cellar or dairy that can just be seen under the fig tree are indications of an early dwelling. (David Moloney)

In 1858 Djerriwarrh parish (north and west of Melton town) had 883 acres in crop compared to Yangardook's 861 acres. ¹⁶³ This Melton area also had 'famous returns' in the 1850s. ¹⁶⁴ Wheat was by far the largest crop at this time, followed by oats, hay and barley.



¹⁶² Hjorth, op cit; Cameron, op cit, p.2

Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1858-59, Vol.2 'Agricultural and Livestock Statistics', p.19
 Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1866, Vol.1, 1st Session, p.89.

Ruin of early McIntosh's Toolern Vale1850s farm, overlooking the original Greenhills pastoral run. The hearth exhibits fine workmanship of sedimentary stone. The tank is later. (David Moloney)

Elsewhere, particularly in the plains area, farming was limited by the extensive holdings of the large pastoralists, and by natural conditions such as soil and water. In 1858 the parish of Kororoit had 439 acres under crop, and Pywheitjorrk 309 acres. 165

However Derrimut in the south-east had only 139 acres cropped. 166 The parish of Derrimut had been sold in parcels of about 100 acres to facilitate purchase by small farmers. Although most of the Crown land there was purchased by WJT Clarke, 59 different buyers were still able to purchase allotments, although only about 30 separate holdings were actually settled. And most of this land had reverted to grazing before long. The natural conditions of the area, its stony soils and lack of water, prevailed over the ideal of the yeoman farmer as adjacent pastoralists gradually accumulated more of their properties. 167

Despite the difficulties of those trying to establish small farms without capital, Melton was generally a flourishing new agricultural district in the 1850s.

The 1860s to 1890s

The early 1860s marked a turning point in the area, 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 soils, and the crops were infested with rust and caterpillars, and decimated by droughts. The advent of pleuro-pneumonia in cattle was devastating for those who relied on their 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 Peel's 'Sunbury' district (which stretched from Bacchus Marsh to Craigieburn, and included Melton), occurred in 1859. This figure was halved by 1864, and a further slight decline occurred during the next two decades. 168

The beginnings of these changing fortunes are apparent in the West Bourke agricultural inspector Watson's report for 1861-62. 'The crops ... have suffered severely from the extreme dryness of the season', blight had affected the hay and the potato crop was not worth harvesting, he reported. Homesteads were 'generally very much neglected'. Parties were leaving and selling to their neighbour: 'Mr Clarke and other large proprietors purchasing the small holdings, and the holders leaving for New Zealand. The report of the following year noted the continued drought (although the Yangardook area seems to have been less affected), 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. 170

The next year's report contains the news that over the summer of 1863-64 'rust and the caterpillar' had visited 'nearly every farm in the district, causing great devastation'. Some large owners, apparently including 'WJT Clarke and Son' had reduced the rent of tenants who

 $^{^{165}}$ VPP, 1858-59, loc.cit.; The parishes of Maribyrnong, Holden and Buttlejorrk - only partly within the Shire of Melton - had comparable areas under crop.

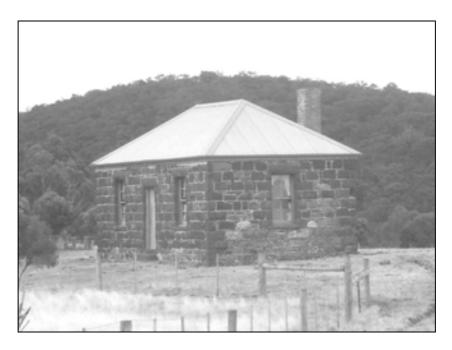
¹⁶⁶ VPP, 1858-59, *loc.cit*.

¹⁶⁷ Peel, op cit, pp.56-57, 62

¹⁶⁹ Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1862-63, Vol.4, pp.50-53. He was probably referring to the Otago goldfields. ¹⁷⁰ VPP, 1864, *op cit*, p.94

had suffered from this 'dreadful calamity'. The potato crop had been good, and a greater variety of crops was now being planted. While pleuro-pneumonia was no so virulent, the inspector had recently 'met a gentleman from Derrimut, who informed me that he had lost 27 of his best milkers' to the disease. 171

In 1864-65 it was reported that a much smaller wheat crop had been planted. Due to almost complete failure of the previous year's crop farmers could not afford to purchase the seed. But at least the rust had been restrained by the continuance of dry weather. However, yet another 'calamity' visited the area, the 'Black Monday' bushfires: 'The Green Hills and Melton district have also suffered severely, the fire consuming the produce of several large farms.' 172



Yangardook Cottage, Gisborne Melton Road. The property was taken up for farming in the 1850s; this cottage was Built c.1860s. (David Moloney)

By this time realisation of the dangers of poor farming practices was dawning. Soil exhaustion, the 'continual cropping with cereals without manuring' had so impoverished 'the once fine districts of Gisborne and Melton as to leave them scarcely a tithe of their originally famous returns'. In contrast:

'The affect of good farming is apparent in the returns of ST Staughton Esq, who has raised thirty bushels of wheat to the acre on by no means strong soil.' 173

The exceptional drought, which continued through the 1865-66 season, was: '... most disastrously felt over the whole line of the plain country, extending from Essendon to the Djerriwarrh Creek...' Yangardook and the higher areas once again produced the best crops. The inspector described Melton then as a 'pretty though parched up township'. Near Mt Atkinson one of the farmers had recently lost cattle to pleuro-pneumonia. The hoped-for

¹⁷¹ Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1864-65, Vol.3, p.93. The drier lands that were soon to be opened for selection on the lower Goulburn and the Wimmera were not affected by rust. Consequently, wheat growing soon moved north from the 1850s farming areas such as Port Phillip and Kyneton. ¹⁷² VPP, 1864-65, *op cit*, p.89

¹⁷³ *ibid*, p.90

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. 174

Local memoirs confirm the difficulties faced by small farmers in the area. In the sharp economic downturn of the early 1860s, John Chandler got out of carrying, and purchased a small farm in Melton:-

'I worked very hard ... ploughed 36 acres and sowed it; planted several acres of mangels; and worked day and night to accomplish it; but I was strong and wiry. I had five or six cows milking, besides pigs etc to feed, but had a good servant girl to help us. 175



Nineteenth century farm houses on the Kororoit Creek. The bluestone cottage was built by selector John Mangovin in the late 1860s. The weatherboard cottage was built in the later nineteenth century, probably by the Moylan family which had subsumed the selection by this time. (David Moloney)

It was not only large farms that suffered on Black Monday as flames suddenly swept over the hills and rushed across the plain. With wet blankets Chandler helped to partly save a neighbour's property, and thanked God that his own family survived. A subscription was got up for those who were ruined, but he was unable to contribute much:

"...for my crops had failed, and I had no grass. My cattle I had to drive five miles to water. They were reduced to skin and bone, and it was distressing to look at them. I had to kill four cows ... as they could not walk to water. I lost some very nice heifers on the common. They got the disease and died, and I had to leave them all, for I dared not bring them home, as my other cattle would have caught the disease..." 176

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¹⁷⁴ Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1867, Vol.3, 1st Session, pp.83-84.

¹⁷⁵ Chander, op cit, p.177

¹⁷⁶ *ibid*, p.175

Farm labourer and carrier Anders Hjorth records that the 'dread disease' pleuro-pneumonia made its appearance among the herds grazing on the unsold Crown land to the east of Melton that were used as farmers commons.¹⁷

Chandler's sister and her family came to live with his family at Melton: 'We did the best we could for them, but we were all very poor. When bread was very dear we made pollard bread...' Both he and his sister lost one of their little children at the time. As well, 'land sharks' (squatters agents he thought) had forced him to pay nearly four times the price he would have paid under the Selection Acts for land he bought at Melton Forest. 178

'The farm did not pay, for I only got one good crop in three years', said Chandler. ¹⁷⁹ In the mid 60s, deeply depressed, he took his family back to the city where, eventually, he prospered greatly. It was probably during this 1860s drought that some farmers sent their cattle to Gippsland 'but as the grass was different they did not do well.' 180

Especially during 1861-64, but also over the following decades, many impoverished farmers left their properties. Population movements mirror the decline in farming fortunes. About 250 people per annum had arrived in Peel's 'Sunbury' area (including Melton) during the period 1854-57, and 600 people per annum in 1857-61. In 1861 however there was a dramatic reversal, with decreases of 190 people per annum in 1861-71, and 55 people per annum in 1871-81. The number of land holdings fell by 30% in the district between 1860-81, and the size of those holdings rose steadily as properties were progressively purchased by neighbouring farmers or graziers, especially WJT Clarke. 182 The ruins, perhaps the dwellings. of some of these small farms survive today.

While the mid 60's was something of an exodus, the decline continued at lower levels over ensuing decades. And new settlers moved in, probably attracted by the falling prices of land or rents. And there were sales of surplus Crown land (often farmers or town commons, or water or timber reserves) under the Selection Acts. Much of the land sold during this period was in the Parish of Kororoit, around Rockbank and the Kororoit and Toolern Creeks. 183 In the 1860s sales took place around the township of Melton, and continued into the 1870s (perhaps even later) in more remote or difficult country, such as the Djerriwarrh forest.

Although often swampy or forested, these sites were still highly sought after. Hjorth relates the atmosphere of a 'great Fair' at the sale of the Long Forest west of Melton, and swampier land to its east in about 1865. An influx of selectors from as far away as South Australia arrived in all sorts of conveyances, a good many in covered wagons. ¹⁸⁴ But Hjorth still thought the odds continued to be stacked against the 'small farmer' in the new land sale system. 185

180 Cameron, op cit, p.16

185 ibid

^{177 &#}x27;Recollections of Melton 1861-67', by Anders Hjorth, reproduced in the MDHS News Sheet, April

¹⁷⁸ Chandler, op cit, pp.175-6

¹⁷⁹ *ibid*, p.179

Peel, op cit., p 80. (Peel's 'Sunbury' area, from Bacchus Marsh to Craigieburn, including Melton) ¹⁸² Peel, *op cit*, pp.127-135.

¹⁸³ Parish Plans. Most Crown land by this time was sold under the Selection Acts, so historical records of any surviving original houses, barns, wells or fences on these properties is likely to survive. ¹⁸⁴ Hjorth, op cit.

In 1867 Hjorth moved to the Djerriwarrh Creek forest where he established a successful irrigated garden, the dam for which still remains. Djerriwarrh was one of a number of small rural communities that survived during these difficult years, and was eventually successful in obtaining a school. There were many small schools that were established to serve the farmers' children throughout this period. Apart from Melton and Toolern Vale all had chequered fortunes and were often short-lived, sometimes reopening after a few years, or operating part-time in conjunction with a nearby school. In this they reflected the fragile and changing fortunes of small-farming districts. They included Mount Atkinson, Rockbank (New Cambridge), Mount Cottrell, Exford, Djerriwarrh Creek, Kororoit, Aitkens Gap (Buttlejork), Diggers Rest, Melton South, Melton Park, Sydenham West and Keilor Rd Station.



Andre Hjorth's Farm beside Derriwarrh Creek. Like Newnham, Scarborough, Moloney and other successful early farmers, Hjorth's income was supplemented by other activities, such as 'dealing' in local produce.

While schools are a guide to the progress of permanent settlement by families, there was also a large floating population of seasonal workers, mostly single men, living in the Shire. These men built fences and dry stone walls, and were vital for harvest time chores of reaping, stooking, and threshing. In the early days farm labourers outnumbered proprietors about three to one, ¹⁸⁸ and many farms had separate accomodation for farmhands. The advent of farm machinery had an impact on this population. When it began in the 1850s, the Melton Agricultural Society had not exhibited machinery. ¹⁸⁹ But in the 1860s Samuel Kitson introduced a back delivery reaping machine to the Toolern district. The neighbours called the great lumbering affair the 'Great Eastern', no doubt alluding to Kitson's former life as a sea captain. In the tradition of Luddites concerned that they were being replaced by machines, the farm labourers placed pieces of wire in the crop where it would be working. ¹⁹⁰ Mr James of

¹⁸⁶ Hjorth, *op cit*. His crops included tobacco, which the West Bourke agricultural inspector's reports had noted was a promising crop in the area, given its increasing use in the treatment of scab in sheep. ¹⁸⁷ Blake, LJ (ed), *Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria*, Vol.3 (Education Department of Victoria, 1973).

¹⁸⁸ Peel, *op cit*, p.20

¹⁸⁹ Alexander Cameron, op cit.

¹⁹⁰ Hjorth, op cit; Cameron, op cit, p.2

Bacchus Marsh had the first threshing machine in the district. ¹⁹¹ Ralph Parkinson brought two threshing machines into the Melton district from Kyneton. ¹⁹²

In 1866 the West Bourke agricultural inspector had recommended that farmers should combine grazing with agriculture, and rotate crops. Over the nineteenth century more viable methods of farming, including the combination of grazing and cropping, did in fact develop. Land was sown with introduced pasture species, and by 1880 in Peel's 'Sunbury' region wheat had been almost completely supplanted by hay crops. Here was a movement in the area away from grain cropping towards dairying and hay production. The dairy herd was for butter and cheese production, and was typically combined with pigs. Others combined hay and sheep. Poultry, bee keeping and splitting palings might also have supplemented a farm's income. Income.

Olwen Ford describes rural life in the district:

'Harvest was an important time in the regional calendar, affecting attendance at shire council meetings, and school. Hundreds of children and an army of permanent, temporary and seasonal workers assisted the local farmers. Travelling threshing machines were used around the Bacchus Marsh – Melton area ... Reaping machines, hay presses and winnowers were being introduced on a few properties.' 197

On his tour through Melton district in late 1876 the *Australasian's* 'Travelling Reporter' observed the relatively small amount of farming in the area:-

'After leaving the town of Melton, we pass through a great deal of flat open country, nearly the whole of which is used for grazing, but there is now but little grass to be seen, and many of the cattle appear to be literally starving. Several small farms are passed, but there is nothing calling for special remarks until we arrive at the farm of Mr Samuel Kitson ...' 198

However the reporter did visit the larger and more successful farms of the area, and noted the changes that were then occurring:-

'Most of the land belongs to Mr WJ Clarke and is known as the Rockbank estate, but here and there a small farm is to be met with. To the traveller passing through the district by the main road, it would appear as if farming was abandoned, as there is but little to be seen. There is however, a good number of settlers in the locality, most of them being old residents, and generally speaking they appear to be doing very well. Formerly a great deal of land in the district was under cultivation for grain, but of late years most of the farmers have devoted their attention to grazing, dairying and feeding stock for market giving surer returns than cropping.' 199

¹⁹¹ Cameron, op cit, p.13

Cameron, *op cit*, pp.10-11 He appears to have been a contractor first, and a farmer later.

¹⁹³ Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1867, Vol.3, 1st Session, p.84.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid*, p 94.

¹⁹⁵ Sutherland, 1888, *op cit*, pp 419-439

¹⁹⁶ Peel, op cit, p.116.

¹⁹⁷ Olwen Ford, 'Rural Activity in Melbourne's West, 1851-1880' (Appendix 2A, Melbourne's Western Region Historical Outline, Melbourne's Living Museum of the West, Melbourne Western Region Commission, Draft Only, nd), p.1

¹⁹⁸ The Australasian, 18th November 1876

¹⁹⁹ The Australasian, 21st October 1876

Every farmer that he visited reported that in the past two or so years cropping had been replaced by dairying (mainly butter making) as the principal activity on the property. It was less labour intensive, and its returns were more reliable. Wheat cropping, prone to rust in the area, had already been almost totally abandoned. English grasses and lucerne were being planted, and hay was increasing in popularity. Even 'one of the richest portions of the Melton district ... Green hills' (Toolern Vale) was caught up in the change:-

'Formerly a great deal of the land was under cultivation, and very heavy crops were generally obtained, but of late years dairying has been the principal occupation of the settlers' 201

Around Melton firewood was a substantial industry that doubtless supplemented some farmers' incomes.



Pinewood, the home built for large farmer / small grazier John Beat, one of the successful 'old residents' referred to by the agricultural inspector. The home was built c.1870s to replace the original 1850s homestead beside Kororoit Creek. (David Moloney)

The demise of the Melton Agricultural Society in about 1874 was a sign of the times. (Although this may also have been related to the need for rationalisation of the small neighbouring societies - Melton, Bacchus Marsh and Gisborne - that had been created in the 1850s, when road communication was primitive and difficult.)²⁰² It had limped on for a few years previously. In 1869 it was postponed due to the drought, and in 1870 it was proposed to wind it up and hand over the yards to the Mechanics Institute. It was still in existence in 1876 when there was a large number of blood stock entries in all sections.²⁰³ Sometime later its yards were taken over by Melton state school.²⁰⁴

David Moloney

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 $^{^{200}}$ The Australasian, October to November 1876

²⁰¹ The Australasian, 18th November 1876

²⁰² In 1873 WJ Clarke had founded the West Bourke Agricultural Society, which held its annual show on his Bolinda Vale property; Clarke, M, *Clarke of Rupertswood 1831-1897* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 1995), p.81

²⁰³ Bilszta, Pastoral and Agricultural Foundations, op cit

²⁰⁴ Pollitt, *op cit*, pp.54-55

Nineteenth Century Farming Heritage Places

General

The hallmark of the nineteenth century farming era in the cultural landscape are small community buildings, such as a church, school, hall or hotel.

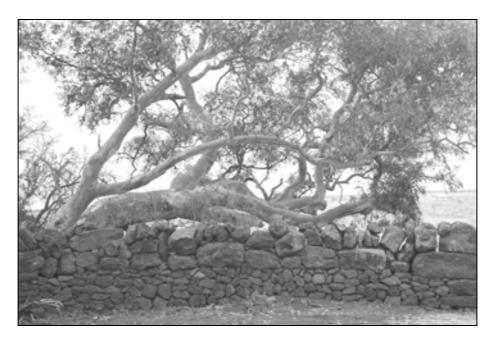
Some of the larger and more successful farms retain early buildings such as stables, machinery and shearing sheds, dairy or stock yards.

A number of bluestone cottages, or more often ruins of a cottage, survive. The cement dome of an underground tank often survives with these ruins; invariably this is all that remains. A few stone chimneys of an earlier mud or slab hut also survive. More often exotic plantings - perhaps an old peppercorn, fruit, fig, olive, pine, poplar, or cypress tree - testify to a pioneer family. Many such sites are situated near a waterway; in contrast newer homes are situated nearer the road. Some may date back to the 1860s rural distress; other pioneers lived in these cottages until their passing, often around the end of the century. Nearby there may be a small quarry or hole from which stone or clay was obtained for the building.

Stone Walls

The low bald mounts that rise above the Melton plains do not immediately impress as fuming volcanos. But unspectacular 'shield volcanos', such as Mount Cotterell and Mount Kororoit (south and north-east of Melton), the diminutive Mount Atkinson (south of Rockbank), Casey Hill (3 kilometres west of Toolern Vale), and Aitkens Hill and Mount Tophet at Aitkens Gap, are the origins of the fieldstone that was gathered up by early settlers and shaped into the walls that characterise the landscapes near these rises. Studies have shown that the volcanic hilltops are also a rich source of Aboriginal archaeological deposits.

Melton's Mount Cotterell had one of the biggest lava outputs of Victoria's Western District volcanic area - the great plain that stretches from Darebin Creek in Melbourne to Mount Gambier in South Australia - the largest volcanic area in Australia.



Mt Kororoit Farm: a remarkable style dry stone wall and indigenous Kororoit Creek Red Gums come together. (David Moloney)

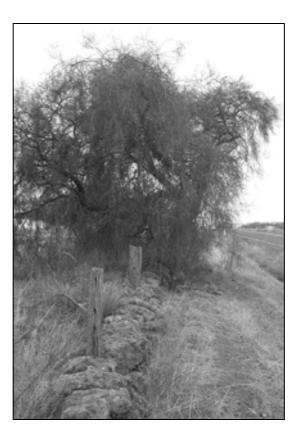
The remnant dry-stone walls of Melton constitute one our most substantial links to this distant age. They tell of the natural history of the volcanic creation of the area, and of the cultural history of its human modification. The stone walls also have the potential to provide information about early European farming traditions, and the changes which have occurred since the early 1850s.

The enclosure of the land represents one of the Europeans' most profound marks on the landscape. While the early pastoral phase had left most of the Shire open, the advent of freehold, and farming, in the 1850s necessitated more intensive land divisions. Fencing was necessary to mark property boundaries and secure stock; to divide paddocks within properties for the control of stock and management of cropping; for stock yards; for protection of the home and garden from farm animals and stock (and fowl houses); and for aesthetic effect. The Fencing Act, the outbreak of pleuro-pneumonia in the 1860s, and the proclamation of the 1870 Scab Act hastened enclosures. ²⁰⁵

David Moloney

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²⁰⁵ Bilszta, J 'Dry Stone Wall: Faulkner's Road, Mt Cottrell' (9/9/1990)



Dry Stone Wall and surviving early plant of the plains area, Black Hills Road. The casuarinas tree appears to be very old as well as rare. (David Moloney)

Stone was the most popular material within those parts of the Shire that had volcanic fieldstone scattered across the land. Stone walling resolved two problems: the need to clear the land of rocks, and the need for fencing. In areas with fewer stones, or near forests, early fences are more likely to have been of less durable post-and-rail, or post-and-wire. By the 1860s timber, probably from the Mt Macedon area, was used for farm fencing in Melton (Chandler records having lost his fences in the Black Monday fire). Any remnant of early timber fencing is likely to be rare.

Although the wire fencing introduced in the 1850s was cheaper than either stone or post-and-rail fencing, the local availability of stone in the area, and the relatively low cost of labour, made the more laborious stone construction economically competitive, especially in the late 1850s and early 1860s. The enclosure of land was one of the first improvements required by the Selection Acts, and property files pertaining to the Crown land sold from 1860s provide records of the length, and types, of fences erected in those localities. The main period of construction of dry-stone walls in Melbourne's west was in the period 1850-1880, after which improvements made wire considerably more economical than stone walling. However, stone walls were still repaired, and a few new ones built, into the twentieth century.

It is estimated that there was 23 miles of stone walling on the Moylan brothers' Mt Kororoit property by 1870. Sale of property advertisements in the local paper suggest that the properties on the Keilor Plain east of Toolern Creek were almost entirely walled. Advertisements for stone wallers in the Buttlejorrk, Diggers Rest and Rockbank Estate areas appeared regularly until 1890. Further south, substantial stone

walls were also built in the Mt Cotterell and Werribee Plains area. ²⁰⁶ Later, in the 'Rocky Bank' area farmers built fences not only with field stone, but with the fragments of boulders that had to be blasted out of paddocks. Sometimes 'floaters' would be gathered from crop land as they appeared, and stacked under fences, making a rubble stone fence, rather than a professionally built 'dry stone wall'. (Eg, Witchmont Winery today.) In some areas, such as parts of Toolern Vale, stone fences were never as common as post-and-rail fencing. Extensive, though generally quite deteriorated lengths of Clarke's *Rockbank* estate boundary walls survive.



A deteriorating dry stone wall on the Melton Plains, looking north from Boundary Road towards its source, Mount Cottrell. (David Moloney)

Although many were damaged by the building of the railway in the 1880s, the walls remained virtually intact until about WW1, when much of the walling was breached for farm machinery in the wake of the break-up of the large estates. During the twentieth century stone fences were regularly damaged by weekend 'rabbiters' in search of their quarry. On Monday mornings they would be repaired by the farmers. It is also likely that some landowners removed them in an attempt at rabbit control. Large sections of the walls to the east of the Shire were also replaced by post-and-wire fencing during the 1930s.

Nevertheless, stone walls are more durable than timber post and rail or wire fences, and many have survived in various degrees of intactness. The best preserved and most picturesque examples of stone fences are on more isolated roads, or out of sight in the back paddocks of rural properties. Generally the more solid and professionally constructed all-stone walls that survive are site-specific, that is, limited to particular rural properties, or homestead yards.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ *ibid*.

 $^{^{207}}$ ibid

²⁰⁸ Mary Tolhurst, personal conversation.

²⁰⁹ This was also observed by Gary Vines, in 'Built To Last', *op cit*., and in the Heritage Study of the adjacent Bulla area.

While walls on Faulkners and Mt Kororoit Roads are prime examples of all-stone construction, in general most of the remnant early fences are of the 'combination' style, with low stone walls, and split timber post-and-wire above (or, rarely, timber rail). This is in common with the rest of the Keilor and Werribee plains, with access to both stone and split timber. ²¹⁰

During the late 1860s and 1870s many colonial farmers believed that stone, post-and-rail, wire, or combination fences should gradually be replaced with hedges. These could shelter stock from the cold, and crops and pastures from the hot Australian winds. Hedges began to be planted along the fence lines, with the intention of overgrowing and eventually replacing the 'less permanent' types of fence. For example, Osage Orange and Briar Rose were advertised in local papers for sale in large lots. Other species that might be found include Boxthorn, Hawthorn, Briar Rose (also called Wild Rose, or Sweet Briar), the native Tree Violet (which is indigenous to rocky volcanic areas), and the South African Honeysuckle or Red Trumpet Flower. Along some fences these species have apparently been self-sown by birds. No pure hedge fences would appear to remain in the study area, although remnants of hedges in conjunction with stone, post-and-wire/rail fences do survive.

Approximately 45% of the dry stone walls surviving in the Shire today were erected as part of the Clarke Rockbank pastoral estate. Of the balance, it is estimated that three larger farmers – the Beatys on Blackhills Road (8.5%), Hopkins & Farragher on Hopkins Road (7.4%)²¹¹, and the Moylans on Mount Kororoit Road (5.6%), between them built another 21.5% of the remaining walls. The residual one third of the walls in the Shire were built mainly by smaller farmers and selectors. On the remaining evidence, the Missens of Rockbank (3.3%), Payne of Rockbank (3.2%), Campbell of Toolern Vale (1.6%), and Gidney of Rockbank (1.4%) appear to have been the next most prominent dry stone wall builders in the Shire.

With the spread of urbanization, many walls along roads are subject to theft for suburban gardens. While some have been repaired by their owners (not by professional wallers) others have left them to their fate, with a new post & wire constructed fence behind them. Many farmers are concerned that they harbor rabbits, while others understand their advantages, particularly as a significant retardant to grass fires.

Some of the best dry stone wall dams are threatened by unchecked rabbit burrowing underneath them.

Domestic Water Supply:- Underground Tanks

Underground tanks were a typical component of nineteenth century rural properties in Victoria, and illustrate a form of water collection and infrastructure no longer practised. Today they are often all that survives of some nineteenth century farm properties.

Provision of a domestic water supply was critical to the establishment of any rural property that was not beside a permanent supply of water. 'The first essential was to secure a reliable water supply. Unless the farm bordered a permanent creek ... the

²¹⁰Vines, 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); Peel, op cit, p 108.

²¹¹ The subdivided paddocks in this area were traded between Hopkins and Farragher and others in the early years, and it is not certain who built some of the walls. Their adjacent farms constitute have what is probably the highest density of drystone walls remaining in Melton Shire.

selector had to dig a dam for his animals and a well [sic] for the household supply.²¹² (Many of the first generation farm buildings were situated near the Toolern and Kororoit Creeks. The public roads at the time were little better than the long tracks across the farms to the cottages, but as roads improved, and galvanized corrugated iron roofs and header tanks came into play, the next generation of farm houses situated away from streams and close to the road.)

Especially in low-rainfall Melton, domestic water storage was critical, and relics of these domestic water systems are a key part of the heritage of the Shire. Most if not all of the underground domestic 'wells' (as they are usually called) around Melton are in fact 'tanks' which, rather than tapping groundwater, were sealed cisterns for the storage of water from the roofs of buildings.



An earlier style underground tank on former Moloney property, Mount Cottrell Road, probably built c.1871 when the selection was settled. It may originally have had an iron roof.

(David Moloney)

Underground tanks became only generally necessary in Australia from the 1850s, when increased population and Crown land sales ensured that many dwellings were unable to locate beside a stream. From this same time, as a result of the goldrushes, the mass introduction into Australia of the new product 'corrugated iron' made it feasible for ordinary people to be able to channel water into the underground tanks from roofs and guttering. Underground tanks on small properties generally seem to have been located at the rear of the house; this might have enabled the roof runoff from dairy and other nearby farm outbuildings to also feed the tank.

David Moloney

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²¹² Cannon, Michael, *Life in the Country: Australia in the Victorian Age: 2* (Nelson, West Melbourne, 1978), p.149

Hughes, Trueman, Ludlow, 'Wells and Underground Tanks', prepared for the Heritage Council of NSW (nd), passim; Cannon, op cit, p.150

The construction of wells goes back thousands of years, and designs for underground wells and tanks, such as contained in JC Loudon's Encyclopaedia of Agriculture, had been available to English farmers since at least the early nineteenth century. 214 These generally advocated cigar shaped cross-sections, with the domed top being mostly underground. This shape was also used in Australia, but on Melton rural properties they do not appear to have been used on early farms. Instead, the early tanks had vertical walls, and no domed covers. Most appear to have been constructed of local stone rather than brick, and without a low wall (as in romantic images of European wells) to ensure safety. Isolation and cost probably meant that they may have been sunk by the property-owners, at least in the case of small farms. Examples of such tanks on small farms are the former Scarborough and Moloney properties on Mount Cottrell Road (Place Nos.293 and 292) which were constructed of bluestone in the 1850s and 1871, and for which no evidence of a cover remains. In terms of larger early (1850s) properties, Glen Elgin (Place No.39) has a low timber-framed gabled roof, clad in corrugated iron; and the tanks of Tibbermore (Place No.392), Mount Ida (Place No.002) and the Diggers Rest Hotel (Place No.067) both have flat corrugated iron covers on raised stone sides. (These covers, and sides, might have been added later, as gradual modernisation of the tanks was common.)

While domes were advocated in early British architectural literature, they appear to have only begun to be built in Australia in the 1860s. At that time there was a growing realisation of the dangers of uncovered wells and tanks in terms of sanitation, as well as safety. Unclean water could wash into uncovered tanks from dairies, and sometimes from cesspits, and vermin also obtained easy access:-

'The typical countrywoman of the early days hardly moved a step from her threshold "to cast away indescribable filth". The contents of chamber pots, vegetable peelings, grease-laden water – all festered around the hut and blended with the nearby latrine to create a "peculiarly offensive" odour which attracted swarms of flies. Sometimes the fluids soaked through the soil into the well [sic], so that the family suffered from an intermittent "low typhoid" fever whose cause they did not suspect.' 215

In 1885 *Martins Home and Farm* described uncovered underground tanks and wells as 'the family rat-trap'. Common infections of the nineteenth century, such as typhoid, scarlet fever, diphtheria (which was known to have proved tragically fatal in the case of Melton's Kerr, Moloney and Wood families), tuberculosis and gastro-enteritis, spread rapidly in many country towns Efficient disposal of human excreta was a major problem.' The connection between water pollution and public health, in particular diseases like dysentery, typhoid and even cholera were beginning to be appreciated. ²¹⁸

At the same time, technology was contributing to better health. As long as a bucket was necessary to draw water, it was not possible to cover the tops of tanks, or at best only to provide a rudimentary cover. Once a small and reasonably priced pump became available there was no further need for an open tank. The availability of domestic handpumps grew in the 1850s, and by 1860 NSW public buildings (schools and railway

²¹⁴ J.C. Loudon, *Encyclopaedia of Agriculture*, Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman, London, 1826.

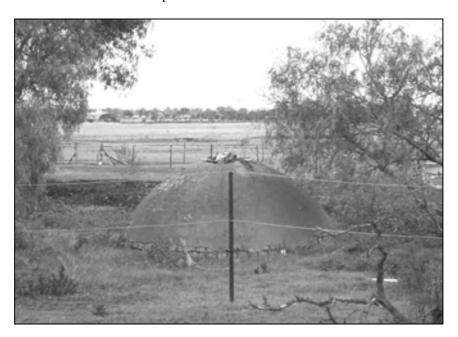
²¹⁵ Cannon, *Life in the Country, op cit*, p.151

²¹⁶ Cited in Hughes et al, op cit, p.19.

²¹⁷ Cannon, *op cit*, pp.255-6

²¹⁸ Hughes *et al*, *op cit*, pp.19-24

stations) specified domes as the standard form of construction for tanks.²¹⁹ It is also highly likely that the increasing access to good quality bricks, professional bricklaying skills, and cement, over the course of the late nineteenth century contributed to the proliferation of covered tanks in places like Melton.



Concrete rendered brick dome on the former Raleigh property, Harkness Road. It possibly a tank built at the time of original settlement (late 1850s) to which a dome was added later. The dome is more a half rather than a segment of a sphere, as in later designs. (David Moloney)

The new tanks were still circular in plan, but constructed of brick, with approximately 9 inches of clay puddle behind the brick wall to keep the tank water-tight. The hemispherical dome, or segment of a dome, was also constructed with bricks. Both the interior of the tank, and the exterior of the dome, were cement rendered according to recommended practice. Without internal inspection it is not known whether the cross-section of the tanks typically remained vertical, or cigar-shaped, which were both described in textbooks. Numerous domes in Melton appear to be segmental spheres, rather than hemispheres, and may have spread underneath the surface to a wider diameter tank cylinder, as per the textbooks. The domes were provided with a manhole on top (covered with a concrete cover), of minimum width 16 inches, to provide access for cleaning. Mr Jeff Robinson of Melton West recalls entering the tank on the family farm to repair internal render. The opening also enabled the cool water to be used for refrigeration: perishables and jellies (for setting) were lowered into the water in a bucket.

The only known Australian heritage study of underground tanks (conducted in NSW), claims that they were only superseded by the familiar corrugated iron tanks (on tankstands to provide water pressure) in the 1890s, when 'the galvanised above-ground tankstands to provide water pressure) in the 1890s, when 'the galvanised above-ground tankstands to provide water pressure) in the 1890s, when 'the galvanised above-ground tankstands to provide water pressure) in the 1890s, when 'the galvanised above-ground tankstands to provide water pressure) in the 1890s, when 'the galvanised above-ground tankstands to provide water pressure) in the 1890s, when 'the galvanised above-ground tankstands to provide water pressure) in the 1890s, when 'the galvanised above-ground tankstands to provide water pressure) in the 1890s, when 'the galvanised above-ground tankstands to provide water pressure) in the 1890s, when 'the galvanised above-ground tankstands to provide water pressure) in the 1890s, when 'the galvanised above-ground tankstands to provide water pressure) in the 1890s, when 'the galvanised above-ground tankstands to provide water pressure water water pressure water pressure water wate

²¹⁹ *ibid*, pp.32-33

²²⁰ Eg, Albrecht, CE, *Measurements and Dimensions of Tanks and Dams* (Melbourne, Arnell and Jackson [1885?]), pp.30-33

²²¹ Mr Jeff Robinson, personal conversation, 14/2/2006. This contradicts the Hughes *et al* survey of tanks in NSW, which found that internal render was rare in domestic tanks (pp.55-56).

²²² Hughes et al, *op cit*, pp.32-80.

was in widespread use.'²²³ In Victoria however Miles Lewis claims that 'the corrugated iron rainwater tank was manufactured in Melbourne by the later 1850s, and spread very rapidly despite claims that the zinc coating would poison the water.'²²⁴ In Melton Shire there is considerable evidence remaining of underground tanks, on both large and small properties; a survey might reveal if there were any mid twentieth century rural properties that didn't have underground tanks, and therefore the extent to which galvanised iron (or steel) header tanks might have been used instead. However, we know that underground tanks continued to be built in the early twentieth century, and that today there are many properties that have both underground tanks (most not in use) and corrugated steel header tanks. As access to hand, petroleum or electric pumps permitted, they may have been used in conjunction.



Early twentieth century underground tank, with segmental sphere dome, and hand pump, at the McIntosh Balmoral Farm, Melton. (David Moloney)

While domes probably became widespread from the 1860s for domestic use, it cannot be categorically inferred that the absence of a dome means that the tank was built before that time. On the other hand, the presence of a dome does not necessarily mean that the tank was built after this time, as the building of a dome over a tank often took place many years after the original construction. (Hemispherical rather than segmental domes may indicate that a dome was added to an existing tank.) The best assumption that can be made in terms of dating tanks is that, water being essential to habitation, they were built at or very soon after the construction of the original dwelling on a site.

Tankbuilders known to have operated in Melton in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries include WA Cecil, Tom Collins (c.1890-1913), and Augustus Schebler ('known for his workmanship' according to Collins). 226

Hughes *et al*, *op cit*. (Austral Archaeology also conducted a study of early Chinese wells on the Koorong, South Australia.)

²²⁴ Lewis, Miles, *Physical Investigation of a Building: National Trust Technical Bulletin 9.1* (National Trust of Australia, Victoria, 1989).

²²⁵ Hughes et al, op cit, p.3

Robinson, *op cit*; also Tom Collins memoirs, part of which were reproduced in the M&DSH Newsletter of December 2000.

The 1890s to World War Two

The advent of the twentieth century marks an historical turning point in Victoria's, and Melton's, history. From the 1860s to the 1890s the population of the Shire declined and then remained stagnant. In the 20 years from 1891 to 1911 the Shire experienced a 60% increase in population. This increase, from 1000 to 1600, reflects a new phase in the rural history of Victoria. It also marks the beginning of the break-up of Melton's immense pastoral estates, and their conversion into crops and mixed farming.

Vineyards

John Aitken had established a kitchen vineyard on his Mt Aitken property by the 1840s. On a visit, John Dunmore Lang, ever energetic in his promotion of Australia's agricultural future, noted Aitken's the 'sylvan cottage' with its vines, orchard and flower garden. Afterwards, in considering the 1845 statistics for Port Phillip, Lang commented that 'there appears to be a disposition to cultivate the vine, which is particularly adapted to that portion of the soil of this province which is dry and gravelly'. 229

The Novel Industry provisions clause under the 1860s Land Acts led to a boom in planting of vineyards in different parts of Victoria. The Sunbury area was one of the most prominent of these districts. At the time the Shire of Melton included the Vineyard Road – Bald Hill area, which was the site of considerable activity by European vignerons. This would account for the agricultural statistics that show the outstanding (within Melbourne's Western Region) level of grape production within Melton Shire. In the late nineteenth century Melton vineyards, 110 acres owned by four vignerons, were producing over 12,000 gallons of wine. Although these vineyards survived phylloxera disease, the production declined dramatically towards the end of the century. The properties would appear to have produced grapes from the 1860s until approximately WW1.

Local memory also associates the early Mt Ida property, and others around it in the Bensons Road Toolern Vale area, with grape growing in the nineteenth century. A simple, and now filled-in unlined earth cellar said to be associated with this use, remains on the original property beside the road. Local tradition (correctly) recounts that a disease devastated the grape industry. There have been no grapes grown in the area since the 1930s. The Western Region Commission's 1994 Rural Heritage Study also says that the *Yangardook* property had at one stage been a vineyard producing grapes for vinegar production by the Seppelts company. As yet no documentary evidence has been found to shed light on the former grape-growing industry in the area.

David Moloney

²²⁷ Victorian Municipal Directories. Note that the area of the Shire had decreased by about 10 square miles in this same period. [Note that listings in the directories will probably always be at least a year or two behind; their use in this history is indicative only.]

²²⁸Lang, *op cit*, p 97.

²²⁹*ibid*, p 102.

²³⁰ Ford, 'Rural Activity in Melbourne's West', *op cit*, p.6, & Tables 12 a, b, c on Grape and Wine Production 1869-80.

²³¹ Robert Kurrle of Holden was one of these. He was identified as a 'vigneron' in the Shire of Melton, *Ratebook*, 1871-72. His property had been pioneered by Stoddart. Another was Felix Bubeck, a Melton councilor for many years.

²³² Olwen Ford, 'Rural Activity in Melbourne's West: 1881-1911', p.6.

²³³ Ian Hunt, personal conversation, 6/3/2002

²³⁴ Johnston, *loc cit*.

Some substantial early vineyards (eg, 80 acres on 'The Vineyard Paddock' Harkness Road²³⁵) apparently flourished on the virgin soils of the Shire elsewhere in the mid nineteenth century.

Dairying

The revolution that occurred in dairying in the 1890s had its impact in Melton. The Victorian government began a major education, financial assistance, international marketing, and infrastructure program for the industry. In barely a decade from 1888, dairying was transformed. 236 Behind this transformation were technical innovations: refrigeration (which made international export possible); the new centrifugal cream separator; and the Babcock tester.

Dairying was transformed from a farm craft, firmly rooted in the traditional agricultural world, into a modern industrial process. Farm dairies, with pans to separate cream, and handoperated butter churns and moulds, were replaced by regional creameries. (In a few years these were replaced, as produce was transported straight to butter factories or milk distributors.²³⁷) The first creamery in the Melton Shire was operating at Toolern Vale by 1896.²³⁸ In 1901 the Victorian Municipal Directories reported that dairying was 'increasing' in Melton Shire.²³⁹

The Melton district's farm statistics, reported in the Express in 1904, indicate that the number of dairy farms in the district had more than doubled to 85; the majority had 5-20 cows, and were no doubt mixed farms, but 6 had more than 50 cows.²⁴⁰

'Great quantities of milk are leaving our railway station daily' the local newspaper reported in 1905. There would be an abundance of grass this spring, and 'a creamery may be started here to take the surplus supply.' 'The number of dairymen is increasing throughout the district', the Express observed:-

'In the near future, when the Exford estate is cut up and sold, the number will be largely increased, as this line of production gives suitable and profitable employment where there is a large family growing up. This district being in close proximity to the city, and no doubt all land offered will be eagerly sought for by capable producers. The Melton station stands second on the list for largeness of milk supply to Melbourne; Yarra Glen being first.'241

In 1910 dairying was listed for the first time as one of Melton's 'leading industries' (together with farming and grazing). ²⁴² By 1915 Toolern Vale's creamery had disappeared from the record. 243 Melton dairy farmers by now contracted to supply McMahon's dairy at Sunbury, or the 'Lifeguard' factory at Bacchus Marsh. Dairying was still listed as one of the Shire's leading industries at least until 1978.²⁴⁴ But by the mid 1960s major changes occurring in this

²³⁵ Jeff Robinson, pers. conv. 19/5/02

²³⁶ Brimsmead, GSJ, '1888 - Turning Point in the Victorian Dairy Industry', pp.67-79.

Dingle, op cit, pp.116-9; Priestly, S. The Victorians: Making Their Mark, (Fairfax Syme Watkins, Sydney, 1984), p.205.

²³⁸ *Victorian Municipal Directory*, 1895, 1896

²³⁹ *ibid*, 1901, 1910

²⁴⁰ Judith Bilszta, research notes.

²⁴¹ The Bacchus Marsh Express, 19/8/1905

²⁴² *ibid*, 1901, 1910

²⁴³ *ibid*, 1915. Note: former resident Leo Tarleton advises that there were once two creameries at

²⁴⁴ Victorian Municipal Directory, 1896-1992

highly regulated industry resulted in the Milk Board cancelling the contracts of many smaller metropolitan-fringe dairies.

Cropping

Knowledge of soil chemistry and plant nutrition was accumulating rapidly. New methods of fallowing, a five fold increase in the use of superphosphates between 1900 and 1914, and the introduction of Farrer's 'Federation' wheat variety in 1902 saw the average yield of wheat per acre increase dramatically and the total Victorian crop rise to new heights between 1900 and 1914.²⁴⁵

The period saw the development of mixed farming - the combination of cropping, stock and sheep farming. Toolern Vale's produce for example was listed as 'wheat, oats, hay, barley etc' during the twentieth century. 246 The development of refrigeration in the late nineteenth century had also enabled a meat export industry, and fat lamb and mutton production became a part of many farms. Hay was especially prominent in the plains area.

Break-Up of the Pastoral Estates

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 80,500.²⁴⁷ These figures are indicative of a watershed in Australia's rural history: the break-up of the large pastoral holdings. They had been encouraged by falling wool prices towards the end of the nineteenth century, and then by the introduction of new Commonwealth land and other taxes in the early twentieth century. With new income and other taxes the grand lifestyle of the landed gentry was rapidly becoming unsustainable. The good prospects for farming, and the democratic temper of the times also made it politic to put more people on the land.

At the turn of the twentieth century the old yeoman ideal was still powerful. There was the same belief in small farms, and the same language (eg 'the plough' versus 'sheepwalks'). Such opinions resulted in the turn of the century Closer Settlement Acts, and then the Soldier Settlement Acts that continued this work after both World Wars. These Acts enabled the State government to buy and subdivide pastoral estates for farmers to purchase and over extended periods, similar to the Selection Acts of the previous century. These farms they created represent the last chapter of the historic movement for 'closer settlement', built on the dream of an Australian yeomanry.

By 1898 the issue was apparently a sensitive one for Melton's big pastoral landholders. The Victorian Municipal Directory for that year contains the first of a series of very unusual entries under the usual 'Leading Industries' heading, which states:-

'Farming and grazing - Harvey Patterson dividing his estate into farms, by sale and also under the share system. Sir Rupert Turner Havelock Clarke, Bart., has leased a large portion of his estate near Melton for grazing and farming; Mr Harry Werribee Staughton also dividing his estate under the share system ... '248

The previous year, as the new owner of the Clarke empire, Sir Rupert Clarke had mused in Parliament about cutting up 40,000 acres of his estate to lease to dairy farmers. He was under

²⁴⁵Dingle, T. *The Victorians: Settling*, (Fairfax Syme Watkins, Sydney, 1984), pp. 112-114

²⁴⁶ Victorian Municipal Directories

²⁴⁷Dingle, *op cit*, p 193.

²⁴⁸ Victorian Municipal Directory, 1898, and following years.

some local pressure to make land available for farming, and declared he was keen not to 'disappoint public expectations.' 249

The Land Act 1898 had established the 'closer settlement' branch of the Lands Department, but it was not until the Closer Settlement Act 1904 that the scheme really developed. This Act enabled compulsory acquisition by the government, and increased five-fold the amount that the Closer Settlement Board could expend on repurchasing land. scheme only commenced operations in 1905.

The regulations under the Act had only just been gazetted when, in May 1905, the Board purchased the 11,336 acre *Overnewton* estate of William Taylor. This was one of the Board's earliest and largest purchases, and the first of several massive purchases by the Board between Keilor and Werribee, which included the *Exford* estate. ²⁵⁰

The *Overnewton* estate included the portion in the Shire of Melton, south and west of Sydenham, and as far west as Kororoit Creek.²⁵¹ It was not until 1923 that the CSB and the Shire of Melton agreed to share the cost of 'road formation and channeling' for the estate; this may have been the result of a protracted period of settler lobbying and negotiations.²⁵² One feature of this scheme was government contribution to infrastructure, from everything from channeling to bridges, dams and irrigation channels. The Melton Shire took the opportunity for new road funding, and a number of remnants of turn-of-the-century Macadam or Telford road construction survive in this part of the Shire.

The Bridge Road concrete bridge, built to provide farmers access Melton South railway station, was a telling product of this period of expansion of small farming. Transport of farm produce at this time was 'by horse and steam':- the understanding of the whole community rail and road builders, and farmers - was that produce was transported by horse to the nearest station, enabling the major part of the transport to be undertaken by steam train.

The next estate sold to the CSB was Harry Werribee Staughton's Exford Estate south-west of Melton. Only the 1500 acre homestead block was withheld by Staughton. As a result the *Exford* bluestone shearing shed and old dairy became part of a new farm called *Warrawong*; by this time however the shearing shed had already been converted to a dairy.

In the early years of the century Sir Rupert Turner Havelock Clarke surveyed his vast inheritance with a view to subdividing and selling rather than leasing it. In 1904, he subdivided his *Bolinda Vale* property. In 1907 he sold 8500 acres of that part of the Clarke estate south of the Western Highway, and west of Mt Atkinson Road. ²⁵⁴ It was also around this time that the balance of his vast *Rockbank* estate, to the east and north of the Shire, were also sold. Melton gained one of its most famous sons, Hector Fraser, international trap shooter, when his father John Fraser came to the area 'when the Rockbank station was cut up into farms.' While land near Mount Cottrell, on Faulkner's Road, was sold in large parcels of 500-1000 acres and remained pastoral, the new farms grew crops of grain, and increasingly important, hay. ²⁵⁶

²⁴⁹Sunbury News: 31/7/1897, 7/8/1897, 4/9/1897.

²⁵⁰ Moloney, D, 'Arundel Road Bridge' (23/7/1991), National Trust of Australia (Victoria).

²⁵¹ Shire Map Series 1892, *op cit*; the Parish Plans, Parishes of Maribyrnong and Kororoit show lands repurchased and subdivided by the Crown.

²⁵² Indenture, 6/11/1923, held by MDHS.

²⁵³ Starr, op cit, p.56

²⁵⁴ Title: Vol 3211 Fol.642206

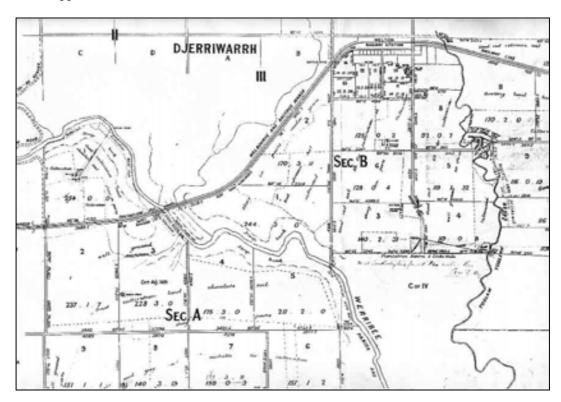
²⁵⁵ Cameron, op cit, p.20

²⁵⁶ Ford, 'Rural Activity in Melbourne's West, 1881-1911', op cit, p.5

The excitement in the district as a result of the revival of farming (including cropping) is palpable in a 1905 report in the local paper. The crops were 'looking splendid' and the harvest was 'promising'. Cultivation was:-

"... principally oats, but several farmers are trying some wheat this year, which seems to be doing well. A large area is under crop this season. On a rough calculation there must be over 6000 acres, and should the average be 2 tons to the acre, how will our road fare? The great bulk of it is bought by Messrs Barrie Bros, and that which is not sold to them will be railed from here.

'The remnant of last years crop is now coming forward, as every day we see hay and chaff being carted to the station in large quantities, and the amount trucked away each day of baled hay and chaff is considerable. The baling press in use by Messrs Barrie Bros does its work in good style, and turns out a bale well pressed and neat in appearance ...',257



Plan showing part of the Exford Closer Settlement Estate in 1907, and Staughton share farms that existed at the time. Several had pumps and pipes on nearby waterways.

(Lands Victoria, P/A D62B)

Closer settlement provided opportunities for employment of farm labourers, or 'hands'. The number of these employees increased 35% in 1906 – 1911 alone. Many of these would have been local children, family members, or casual workers. But many were parts of farm life, living in sheds or rough cottages on farms, and earning meager wages, which some consumed at the local pub. In addition to seasonal harvesting, they milked cows, cleaned pig-sties, and did a range of odd jobs. ²⁵⁸

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²⁵⁷ The Bacchus Marsh *Express*, 19/8/1905

²⁵⁸ Ford, 'Rural Activity in Melbourne's West, 1881-1911', op cit, p.5

As always, debates about best farming practices were lively, the contemporary view being that 'fallowing' was more profitable than 'manure': it kept the ground free of weeds, employed farm hands and horses when last season's harvest was disposed of, and saved wear and tear on horseflesh and machinery through the ground not being left to become dry and hard. Many farmers in the district at the time were also reported to be questioning the new 'superphosphate', and were going back to guano and bonedust. ²⁵⁹

Smaller pastoral estates were also sold off in the early twentieth century. In 1903 James Roberston's executors subdivided and sold his 3800 acre Upper Keilor estate as 10 farming allotments.²⁶⁰ The *Melton Park* estate was sold by Harvey Patterson to John Farrell. After the First World War it was sold to the Government for subdivision under the Soldier Settlement scheme, and about 8 new farms came into being along Harkness and Bulmans Roads.²⁶¹ On Saturday 26th August 1922, 1674 acres of the *Green Hills* estate were sold in 11 lots ranging in size from eight to 302 acres.²⁶² The 3,800 acre Mount Aitken estate was subdivided into small farms (mostly under 200 acres) and sold in 1912;²⁶³ another five allotments north of Aitkens Road were subdivided and sold under the under the Soldier Settlement Act 1946. Later a small part of the Clarke Red Rock estate, located in the very north of the Shire, was sold under the 1946 Soldier Settlement Scheme. Five Second World War soldiers settled on the 350-400 acre blocks, and obtained their titles in the early 1960s.²⁶⁴

Hay

Melton was fortunate in having a somewhat 'niche' agricultural product at this time. Hay had always been important in the Shire, but it became much more so in the early twentieth century. During this time Melton hay became renowned as the best in Australia, as it was slow-growing due to the low rainfall and produced a very hard stem that would cut cleanly. ²⁶⁵

The demand for hay in Victoria reached a peak in the early twentieth century. As the quality of roads had slowly improved over the nineteenth century, chaff-eating horses had taken over completely from bullocks in transport. In the first four decades of the twentieth century hay, together with coal for railways and petroleum for trucks, remained one of the fuels of the transport industry and the growing economy. Hay (and chaff) were also used as farm stock feed, so the early twentieth century farming boom itself created a large market for hay. The rise of dairying in particular required good feed, especially in dry land.

'Outline of Chaff-Milling', p.15

²⁵⁹ The Bacchus Marsh *Express*, 19/8/1905

²⁶⁰ SLV: Auction Notice (Pearson Rowe Smith and Co., and JM Peck and Sons)

²⁶¹ Cameron, *op cit*, p.24; Parish Plans, parishes of Yangardook and Djerriwarrh; Jeff Robinson, pers.conv. ²⁶² Starr, *op cit*, p.78

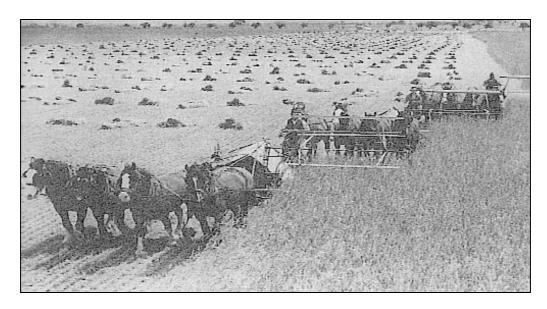
²⁶³ PROV VPRS 460/P0/39635; also Symonds, *op cit*, pp.20-22

²⁶⁴ Parish Plan, Parish of Buttlejorrk

²⁶⁵ Vines, G:-

Vines, Gary, 'Chaff-Mills in Melbourne. Historical and archaeological survey of chaff-mills and related industries in Melbourne's West, Living Museum of the West', Department of Conservation and Environment, 1987

Farm and Dairy (Melbourne's Living Museum of the West, 1993), pp 17-18.



Reapers & Binders at work in a paddock on the corner of Ferris and Ballarat Roads, c.1942. Harry Minns drives the lead team, Eddie Gillespie the middle and Jim Minns the rear teams.

(Melton & District Historical Society)

This peak in demand for chaff coincided with the break-up of the pastoral estates in Melbourne's west, and their conversion to agriculture. Over half of the cultivated land in the region was sown to hay in 1911, most of this coming from the Shires of Werribee and Melton. Hay production in these areas nearly doubled from 1901 to 1911.

In the early years of the twentieth century chaff mills gradually spread out from the North Melbourne haymarket, beyond Ascot Vale and Footscray, to Melbourne's western plains. New mills, always beside a railway, were established at Melton, Werribee, Bacchus Marsh, Rockbank, Diggers Rest, Sydenham, Sunbury and Parwan. ²⁶⁶

The growing of hay is particularly suited to the dry western plains, especially between Werribee and Melton. The soil in the region is sufficiently fertile, and adequate rain falls, but most important, the long, warm, dry summers allow the hay to ripen and dry once it is cut. The Staughton Estate was producing nearly 5000 tons of hay a year by the late nineteenth century, and this formed the basis for the development of Melton's chaff mills.

The Barries, who had one of the district's mobile chaff cutting teams (the Harkness family were another) built a chaff mill at Melton South in 1902. Dixon's mill was established a few years later. The Barries also opened a mill at Rockbank in 1908²⁶⁷ and Austral Grain and Produce opened another at Diggers Rest in 1912.²⁶⁸ Another chaff mill established at Rockbank in 1925 operated on and off until about 1940.²⁶⁹ Yet another operated at Sydenham from 1919 to 1972.²⁷⁰ Hay was a way of life in the area; 'sheaf tossing' was a feature on the program of events at the 1929 'Back to Melton'.²⁷¹

²⁶⁶ Vines, Outline of Chaff Milling, op cit, pp.15-23

²⁶⁷ *ibid*, pp.37-38; Starr, *op cit*, pp. 215-221

²⁶⁸ *ibid*, pp.30-31. (This mill first appears in the *Victorian Municipal Directory* in 1915)

²⁶⁹ *ibid*, p.39; also *Victorian Municipal Directories*, 1935, 1939

²⁷⁰ ibid, p.42

²⁷¹ MDHS 'From our Files'.



'8 foot No. 6 b Binder, drawn by a team of four horses, at work on MacDonald's farm, Melton': Nov 1929. At the lef the sheaves lie ready for stooking. (Museum Victoria)



The Barries' Travelling Chaff Cutter. (Melton & District Historical Society) William Harkness also operated a travelling chaff cutter. In the mid twentieth century travelling threshers, such as those operated by the Trethowans were still hauled by steam traction engines.

The chaff business was booming, and probably at its peak just before World War 11. During the war it was all hay in Melton; no grain at all was grown due to the need for chaff for the

horse-drawn vehicles and farm horses that had been brought out of retirement as a result of the motor fuel shortage. 272

The chaff industry began its decline after the war. From 1946 to 1950 grain slowly began to be grown again as the demand for hay declined. While continued replacement of horse-drawn vehicles by motor vehicles was the main factor, the use of straw for packing, especially bottles, was also in decline. Also, for a time after the war, the transport which was so critical to the mills was severely restricted due to a shortage of rolling stock. In the 1950s the Victorian Railways needed all their large rail trucks to haul brown coal from the new Bacchus Marsh mines. A greater proportion of the chaff now produced at Melton went to Melton racehorse trainers, and Gippsland dairy farmers. Hay and chaff were still used for stock feed and the racing industry, but even here demand declined. The invention of the baler and hammermill, which provided a cheaper alternative for feeding cows, hit the chaff mills, and the introduction of horse pellets and other processed horse feeds hit hay production as well.²⁷³



The perennial threat to chaff mills. Fire destroys the Ward McKenzie chaff mill in Melton South, 1977 (Melton & District Historical Society).

There were also important changes affecting the supply side of hay production. One man could operate a grain header, and bulk handling made grain growing even more labour efficient than hay, which still required many hands for stooking and stacking. The building of bulk silos at railway stations (including Melton South) encouraged farmers to leave hay and turn to grain.²⁷⁴

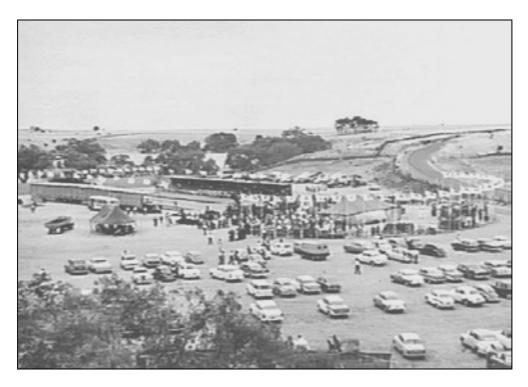
The Melton area's importance in hay production and the chaff industry is evident in that the last two chaff mills in Melbourne's western region to cease operation were in Melton South. In part this was the consequence of the growth of racing and trotting studs in the Melton area, and the advent of hobby farming in the region, with its contribution to the horse population.

²⁷² Vines, Outline of Chaff Milling, pp.22-23

²⁷³ *ibid*, pp.23-24 *ibid*, p.23

Machines and Farm Labourers

In the twentieth century Melton farms played a part in the continuing story of farm machinery improvements. The famous Sunshine works of HV McKay/Massey Fergusson - Australia's largest agricultural implements manufacturer - trialled its new products on farms in the Diggers Rest - Toolern Vale area. The company's photographic collection shows machinery - at first horse drawn - working local farms. The company also organised field days in the district. 275



Aerial view of the site of the Massey-Ferguson 'pageant of products' field day, giving a clear view of the Sydenham-Melton Road (on the north-east side of the Kororoit Creek crossing) and motor vehicles of the era, including several FC Holden's which were released in 1959. (Museum Victoria)

Improvements in machinery, such as the header, also contributed to the continuing decline of the farm labourer. Hay remained labour intensive however, and there was still plenty of seasonal work on the Tarleton's Rockbank farm in the 1930s, when daughter Mary had to cook for eight stookers. ²⁷⁶ It is likely that accommodation for seasonal or permanent employees will remain on some farms in the district (including some established after WW2).

Farming Slows and Declines; New Vineyards

The 1920s brought reversals for farming in Victoria, as new export industries such as dairying came under pressure from international competition. The government provided assistance through the establishment of marketing bodies, and the introduction of bounties or subsidies for farmers. Despite the flourish of farming in Victoria at the beginning of the century, by 1946 the number of holdings had reduced from its 1923 high back to 70,500 farms, the same

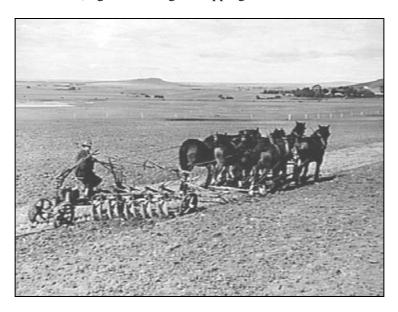
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²⁷⁵ Museum of Victoria collection of photographs.

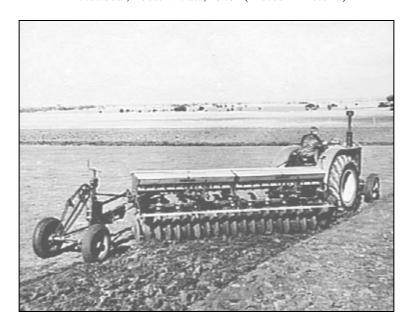
²⁷⁶ Mary Tolhurst, personal conversation.

²⁷⁷Dingle, *op cit*, pp 178-197.

as in 1914.²⁷⁸ Again, the development of Melton seems to reflect these broad changes. After continuing its rise to 1700 in 1919, Melton's population declined gradually during the 1920s to a low of 1300 in 1933.²⁷⁹ Some of the new farms may soon have been consolidated, as grazing (for wool and meat) again challenged cropping.



An 8-horse tandem team pulling a 10-disc `sundercut' disc plough on Messrs. Beaty Bros. farm, `Pinewood', Toolern Vale, 1939 (Museum Victoria)



Mid twentieth century mechanization. At Rockbank in 1955 a 20-row `Sunderseeder' (a `sundercut' with a grain and fertiliser box on top) disc cultivator & seed drill is pulled by a 55k Massey Harris tractor. Also note rubber tyres on the machinery. New large equipment such as ploughs and headers meant that farmers removed many dry stone walls in the farming areas of Melton to allow access to paddocks, and to increase the size of paddocks. (Museum Victoria)

²⁷⁹ Victorian Municipal Directories

²⁷⁸*ibid*, p 193

In recent decades quite a few of the district's established farmers have moved to inland farms, as suburbia and hobby farms brought many problems for farming, including skyrocketing municipal rates.²⁸⁰

In the early 1960s Rockbank Estates Pty Ltd conducted what was apparently a very large subdivision and sale in the area (at least 139 allotments). Most purchasers would appear to have been from European working class inner western suburbs such as Newport and Sunshine looking for a small block. They appear to have been the vanguard of hobby farms or rural residential subdivision in the Shire. It was on blocks such as these that numerous poultry farms were established around the Shire in the mid twentieth century. In general however many farmers named the spread of rural residential development for the declining viability of commercial farming, particularly citing losses of stock to the increased dog population.

Heritage Places and Landscape

The more intensive farming of the twentieth century created a new and distinctive farming landscape in the Shire, with different stock, crops, and scales of operation, different building types and materials, different land-use patterns, and different fencing and plantings.

There are many small to medium sized 1900-1920s wooden bungalows associated with the break up of the pastoral estates, including Closer and Soldier Settlement farms. Naturally, many have had alterations and improvements; others are in poor condition, and many have recently been demolished as new residential estates are built. A few more substantial turn of the century brick homesteads also survive. These places constitute the major record of a major historical turning point in the Shire of Melton, and site reports have been prepared for a total of 19 early twentieth century houses known to have been created as a consequence of the break up of the *Rockbank*, *Exford* and *Overnewton* pastoral estates.

Mature sugar gum, pine and cypress plantings are commonly associated with these sites, invariably in a square or rectangular pattern around the house and outbuildings. Often such plantings are all that remains of these farms, perhaps also with the concrete dome of an underground tank.

Remaining brick or timber milking sheds are especially valuable given the importance of dairying to the small farming in this period. Similarly, small timber or steel framed, corrugated-iron clad two-stand shearing sheds are a hallmark of the new twentieth century farms, together with concrete sheep dips and timber yards. Few of these types of buildings now remain.

In the same way, light steel framed and corrugated iron-clad haysheds provide evidence of Melton's important hay industry, especially since the loss of the Shire's last chaff mill. They also indicate the increased stock capacity of the twentieth century's improved pastures, and so the growing need to store stock fodder on farms. Concrete silos, now apparently remaining on only a few of the larger farms (*Warrawong*, and *Eynesbury*) are also indicative of the widespread change from hay to dairy (and grain) farming in the later twentieth century. Machinery sheds are common.

Unfortunately most 'non-farm' sites remain as evidence of this twentieth century upsurge in farming. The Melton stockyards, Toolern Vale and Melton creameries, chaff mills at Melton South, Diggers Rest and Rockbank, steel bulk grain storage silos at Melton South, and associated weighbridges, have nearly all been lost. All that would appear to remain is the Melton weighbridge, and the railway reservations of former sidings to chaff mills.

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²⁸⁰ Eg, the Palmers, press clipping 25/7/1995.

CHAPTER FIVE: COMMUNITY

Most of the Shire's townships originated as places to service goldrush travellers. Watered camping grounds and hotels, stores and blacksmiths were the genesis of settlements. All of the Shire's townships except for Diggers Rest, Rockbank and Melton South were proclaimed at the time of the first Government surveys. The emergence of these hamlets had been induced by later developments, particularly the coming of the two railways, and by adjacent farming.

After the goldrushes the fortunes of townships depended on the strength of their farming hinterlands. Melton however remained on a major road thoroughfare until the opening of the Melbourne to Ballarat Railway in the late 1880s reduced traffic. The early twentieth century break-up of the pastoral estates benefited nearby towns. Towns situated on railway lines were advantaged, especially in regard to the chaff-milling industry.

Places associated with the development of towns, and civic life, included shops, hotels, blacksmiths, schools, churches, mechanics institutes, sporting fields, postal, Council and other government buildings, memorials, parks and planted avenues. Many of these institutions date from the 1860s when settlements consolidated after the gold-rush and land-sales eras. Some of these buildings remain, others have been replaced or demolished. There was another burst of community building in the early twentieth century.

Some places were merely scattered settlements, more in the nature of farming districts than townships. Some were just a school whose chequered existence bore testimony to the fluctuating fortunes of small farming in the area. A church, hotel or even a post-office in the middle of farmlands might also indicate a former small farming settlement. Especially because of the devastation caused by bushfires in this particularly dry municipality, there is likely to be very little if any built fabric remaining of such communities. Evidence of a former era is more likely to be homestead ruins, archaeological remnants, tree plantings, or evidence of a ford or bridge remaining.

Some grand visions were held by 1850s speculators, who created fantasy towns in the landscape, especially along the Western Highway, Greigs Road and Boundary Road routes to Ballarat. It is not known how much money the so-called townships of Middleton, Staughtonville, or North Uxbridge made for their subdividers, but all the evidence is that purchasers lost heavily. Few probably inspected the land before purchasing, and many simply walked away when they did. Apart from a legacy of complex title legalities for future generations, it seems that these schemes left little if anything in the way of actual development on the ground, or heritage.

Places with historical associations are also included under this theme. These would include places associated with individuals who became prominent in national and international arenas (including sporting events), or places associated with prominent local identities (eg midwife 'Granny' Watts). A place associated with a notable historical incident, or which has become part of local folklore, may also be considered.

MELTON

The township of Melton was surveyed in 1852 and the first allotments sold by the Crown in 1853. By this time goldrush-inspired settlement had already begun, at least to the extent of

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²⁸¹ Scurfield, op cit, p.123; Macdonald, op cit, p.4

Toolern creek having become a camping ground for wagons and travellers. The first buildings were the Melton and Lord Raglan hotels. Another was the Crown Temperance hotel, which was later a police station. Some early buildings were oriented towards Unitt Street, but this soon changed; the Raglan was moved by bullock team to High Street. In an era of 'wattle and daub', the 1853 Melton hotel was typically constructed: in a hurry, and with soft bricks made from Toolern clay faced with bluestone, and it did not stand the test of time. It had large brick stables to accommodate coach traffic en route to Ballarat and Ballan goldfields, and, like most of the local hotels, hosted both informal and formal town gatherings, including court and local government business. Two of the five nineteenth century hotels in the town - Macs and the Golden Fleece - survived until the Satellite City era, when they too were demolished.

As usual, blacksmiths were one of the first businesses established; the nineteenth century through-traffic and small local farming community supported at least three in Melton:- those of Blackwood, McPherson and Cameron. These men were all local community leaders; the walnut tree associated with the site of an old 'smith in High Street is all that remains of this early wayside town's important associations with blacksmiths.²⁸⁷



Blacksmiths, the predecessors of today's automobile repair shops, played a big role in the origins of Melton as a wayside service town. It was situated on the site of the Civic Centre. The walnut tree that remains on the site was later planted by McDonald, one of Whittington's blacksmiths shown in this photograph. (Melton & District Historical Society)

The establishment of the Melton Agricultural Society, the combined Protestant church (1855), and the Melton school (1857) witness the beginnings of a community in the town during the fifties.²⁸⁸ The Agricultural Society, on the north-east corner of Smith and Unitt Streets, was incorporated into the present school, while its shed became the frame of the Mechanics

²⁸² Cameron, *op cit*, p.9; Pollitt suggests that the Melton Hotel was built c.1849.

²⁸³ SLV Map 'Vale V4 p.49' (1857)

²⁸⁴ Cameron, op cit, p.10

²⁸⁵ Macdonald, op cit, p.4

²⁸⁶ Cameron, op cit, pp.17-18; Macdonald, op cit, p.4

²⁸⁷ Macdonald, *op cit*, p.9; also Bob MacDonald, pers. conv.

²⁸⁸ The 1864 Common School is thought to have been preceded by a school dating to 1857 or 1858 (Blake, LJ (ed) *Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria*, Vol.3, Education Department of Victoria, 1973, pp. 33-34; Pollitt, *op cit*, p.44).

Institute. Both the school and the combined Protestant church were timber structures built on the creek flat, the 'common' which is now part of the golf course.

As elsewhere, it was in the 1860s, in the aftermath of the goldrush, that the community consolidated. New institutions were established, and structures hurriedly erected in the 1850s, often with unskilled labour, were replaced by solid structures of bluestone and brick. Many of these lasted until recent times; a few survive today. The Melton Cemetery was established in 1861. The Melton Roads Board was established in 1862; its works included bridges, including 'Graham's bridge' over Toolern Creek, a local landmark until replaced in the 1920s. In 1864 Melton's first Court of Petty Sessions was convened. In 1867 both the Methodist and Presbyterian churches were completed in bluestone. In 1869 the Church of England church, also bluestone, was completed. The Melton Mechanics Institute was formed in the Agricultural Society's shed in 1866.²⁸⁹ Its development was chequered, and it took generations to develop the facilities to their ultimate form, but, until its replacement in the 'Satellite City' era, it was the heart of the community's social as well as intellectual life. The town had a money order post office in 1868. The Melton Roads Board office was completed in 1870; it served the community until 1958.²⁹⁰ In 1871 the Shire of Melton was proclaimed (it had its first meeting at the now demolished Monmouthshire Hotel on Calder Highway). In 1870 the bluestone Melton School No.430 was built on its present site; in 1877 it was extended, also in bluestone. The unrendered brick Catholic Church was built in 1876.



Melton's first community church, also used a school, at the western end of today's golf course. The later Presbyterian church can be seen in the distance.

(Melton & District Historical Society)

Melton was the principal seat of local government in the area, although records shown that Council met alternately at Melton and other smaller settlements during different periods: at the Monmouthshire Hotel (at Diggers Rest) around 1880, at Toolern Vale around 1890, at Toolern Vale and Diggers Rest around 1910.²⁹¹ The Shire boundaries continued to change, even fluctuate, greatly. Each of the State Library's maps of municipal boundaries show another change in Melton's borders. In 1872 parts of what is now Melton Shire were situated in the Shires of Gisborne, Keilor, Braybrook and Wyndham (later Werribee), and Melton

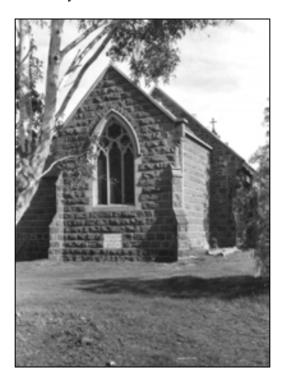
²⁹¹ Municipal Directories

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²⁸⁹ Rogers, M, The Mechanics': A History of Melton Mechanics' Institute 1866-1982 (1985), passim.

²⁹⁰ Macdonald, op cit, p.7

Shire extended into the heart of Sunbury. Over the years some of what is now Melton Shire fluctuated between Keilor and Braybrook.²⁹²



Christ Church Melton 1980 (John T Collins, State Library of Victoria).

Christ Church is now demolished.

During the remainder of the nineteenth century development was limited. The small reservoir on the Toolern Creek (which survives in the Hannah Watts park) was built c.1879-1882, and the McKenzie Street ford/reservoir in 1887. Sport and recreations groups emerged around the 1880s. The present golf course became the focus of hunt club meets, then the first 'publican' races, and then of town sports and athletic meetings. Collins relates that 'Pykes Run', the site of the Melbourne Hunt Club meetings, 'was also the place were the Races were held and the Sports Meeting.' The publican Ryan had purchased the site from Henry Pyke, and later sold it to Clarke. Minns recounted that: 'Still later, athletic sports, cycling and pony races were held annually in Clarke's paddock (later Nixon's) on Keilor Road.' Cameron described the area as 'the sports paddock'.

Collins relates: 'Early in 1900 the recreation park was created and the Caledonian and the ANA sports meetings were held there.' The present Recreation Reserve, on the other side of the highway, was gazetted in 1907, but had probably been used for sports purposes prior to this. In the mid twentieth century the 'recreation park' was popular with picnic parties on Sundays. Sundays. Sundays.

By 1870 the Melton Racing Club had been formed and was holding regular meetings. A racecourse and grandstand was built on Ballarat Road on the west side of town. In 1884

²⁹² SLV, Maps 820 FBF: 1872; 1892; 1924; 1949; 1959.

²⁹³ Collins, op cit.

²⁹⁴ 'Mr George Minns - Looking Back' (MDHS typescript).

²⁹⁵ Cameron, op cit, p.12

²⁹⁶ Collins, op cit.

²⁹⁷ Parish Plan, Parish of Kororoit

²⁹⁸ Robert Macdonald, 'A History of Melton', typescript held by MDHS, c.1969, p.17

Melton was described as 'a wonderfully energetic place in all its movements'. This was certainly true in relation to sport. In 1880 a football team, and then club, was formed. This was formed to sport to a match on the *Eynesbury* lawn. The Gun Club probably also formed around this time, as in 1901 it erected a pavilion, donated by HW Staughton and Captain Staughton. Shooting seems to have been a particularly notable Melton sport: in the early twentieth century the district produced two international champions - trapshooters Donald Mackintosh, and Hector Fraser. Noted gentleman sportsman JO Inglis also attended Melton gun club meetings. When the Golf Club moved to this site ('The Commons') in 1931, it used the gun club pavilion as its clubhouse; this was demolished some time after the new clubhouse was built in 1965. There were also places for passive recreation; the town's 1871 'annual picnic' was held 'about a mile south of the town on the Toolern Creek.' It was followed by dance that night.

The period 1890s to the early 1920s was one of rural growth, and there were signs of the impact of this new life on the town. The town's rail connection in 1884 also provided new opportunities for the timber (for a while), dairy and then the chaff industries. In 1892 the Queen Anne style Court House was built. Together with the decorated brick façade of the Mechanic's Institute, also built in this period (1910), this is the only early public building to survive in High Street. In 1903 a new chancel was added to the Church of England, dedicated to the memory of the recently deceased Captain SJ Staughton. In 1905 Melton obtained its own edition of the *Express* newspaper. In 1910 the State Savings Bank of Victoria became the second bank to establish an agency in the town. It was probably about this time that the Melton sale yards, Council sheep dip, and milk cooler plant near the creek became fixtures in the townscape. They no longer survive.

Yet the population of the town itself declined in the early 1890s, and then remained static;³¹¹ perhaps the growth was primarily in Melton South. Melton also lost two of its four hotels in this era, probably due to a combination of lost road traffic after the railway, limited harvest labour during the First World War, and the general fall from favour of hotels as a result of religious and medical opinion, which culminated in the State's rationalisation of liquor licences around 1911.³¹² This probably contributed to a memorable harvest season when the town's hotels ran dry.³¹³ Working in hay in a dry climate was thirsty work, and the strong relationship between farm labourers and hotels had been of concern to some in the town from early days.³¹⁴

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Macdonald, op cit, p.11

Macdonald, op cit, p.20; Murray, E, The Plains of Iramoo (self-published, 1974), pp.107-108

Macdonald, op cit, p.14

Cameron, op cit, pp.13, 20

Cameron, op cit, p.20

Johnson, M, Melton Valley Golf Club, 1932-1982

Macdonald, op cit, p.8

Macdonald, op cit, p.14

Macdonald, op cit, p.14

Macdonald, op cit, p.14

Bibid

Macdonald, op cit, p.14

Macdonald, op cit, p.15

Macdonald, op cit, p.14

Macdonald, op cit, p.15

Macdonald, op cit, p.17; Victorian Municipal Directory, 1910

Macdonald, op cit, p.17; Victorian Municipal Directories

Macdonald, op cit, p.17; Victorian Municipal Directories

Macdonald, op cit, p.17
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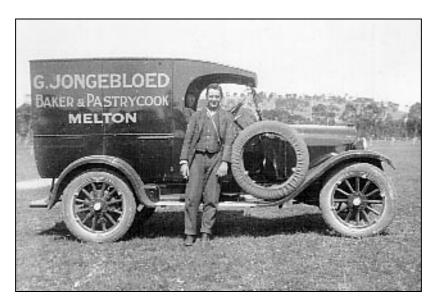
³¹⁴ Cameron, op cit, p.10; Cr Ralph Parkinson had protested against allowing working men to cash their

cheques at hotels.



Football team in front of Macs (formerly Minns) Hotel, in early twentieth century. 'Everything started at Macs Hotel' (June Hatch, M&DHS)

It was in 1885 that the first efforts were made to beautify the town. A petition of townspeople requested Council to plant trees in the main street, and ST Staughton JP MLA offered a team of bullocks to plough the land and material for fencing and also trees, but his offer was turned down. The formal avenues of exotic trees that were planted were unsuccessful, and the community learnt to adapt its aesthetic appreciation to those hardy stalwarts – peppercorns – and the native flowering plantations of the mid twentieth century. These informal native 'plantations' were removed to enable the construction of service roads and parking in the 1970s. The peppercorn, elm and mature native species (mainly sugar gums) that remain now are testimony to the adoption of an *ad hoc* regime, wherein different species were planted at different times, and particularly express the very dry climate, and the lack of reticulated water in the Shire until modern times.



Many of the prominent families in Melton had been associated with bakeries and hotels on the Ballarat Road. Augustus Jongebloed leans on the delivery vehicle purchased by his father Gottfried in 1924. (Melton & District Historical Society)

³¹⁶ Bruce Knox, drawing 'Melton 1930 to 1940'; Macdonald, op cit, p.16

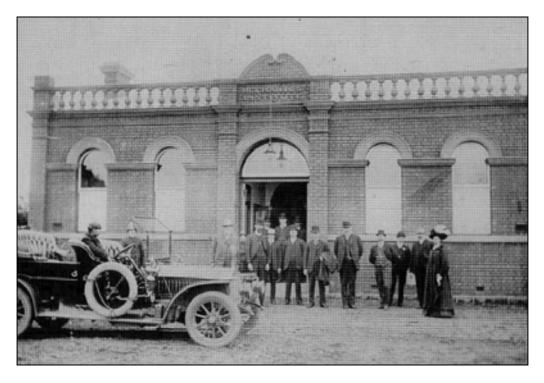
David Moloney

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³¹⁵ Cameron, *op cit*, pp.19-20

In 1935 Victoria's Governor Lord Huntingfield planted the first tree of the CRB highway plantations. On a bypassed stretch of road, some of this elm avenue survives, but in an extremely degraded state. There are other early twentieth century sugar gum plantations surviving in different parts of the Shire. On the Western Highway at Rockbank there is an interesting plantation of different species of pine trees in parts of the median strip and southern verge. Some of these are believed to have been planted by state school children as part of a beautification exercise. There are also individual species of historical significance, such as the High Street walnut tree, and the Coronation Tree in Hannah Watts Park.

The early twentieth century purge by the Licences Reduction Board resulted in the number of hotels in Melton being reduced from four to one. In 1925 'the Mechanics' was extended to its ultimate size. It remained in constant use for town balls (Easter Monday, sporting groups, debutantes), Saturday night dances, amateur concerts, Queen Carnivals, card parties, exhibitions, picture shows, wedding receptions, infant welfare centre etc. At various periods it had been home to community organisations including the Masonic Lodge, Country Women's Association, and Red Cross. It had been the place where the community celebrated its most important occasions, such as the thanksgivings at the end of two world wars, and the 1929 'Back to Melton'. Another of these notable events was the switching on of the town's new 'mains' (SEC) electricity in 1939. Prior to this the Mechanics' had its own sparingly used and mercurial generator; a regular library user in the 1930s described it as an 'oasis of light in the dark street'. The 1950 Queen Carnival held in aid of Bacchus Marsh Hospital produced an all-time record crowd of about 700. 320



Melton Mechanics Institute opening of façade (1910). Official party include Mr and Mrs Harry Werribee Staughton of Exford.

(Melton & District Historical Society)

³¹⁷ Macdonald, op cit, p.16

³¹⁸ Lack, Ford, op cit, p.96

³¹⁹ Rogers, op cit, p.1; Macdonald, op cit, pp. 15, 25

³²⁰ Macdonald, op cit, p.17

From the 1920s until the 1960s there seems to have been very little development in the town. Building developments included the c.1938 brick veneer Sunday School at the Presbyterian Church, and the c.1940 renovation of the Golden Fleece Hotel. The opening of the new Shire Hall and infant welfare centre in 1958 foreshadowed a new era in the town's history.³²¹

The golf course is the most historical precinct in Melton. It covers the land on which the town was originally laid out, before 1850s floods prompted new subdivision along High Street, which then became the centre of the town. It encompass land previously used in association with Pykes Station, early hunt club meets, the camps of diggers and carriers to the goldfields, the first church in the town, the first school in the town, the first race meetings in the town, some of the first streets in the town (Pyke, Bryan, Sherwin, Walton, Denny Streets), the first 'sports ground', the Hannah Watts home/hospital, the gun club, a small coursing ground, the town artesian bore, the town milk cooler, a trotting training track, and land previously known as 'the flat' and 'The Common'. Heritage fabric known to remain in this area includes the Pyke graves, the remains of underground tanks associated with former residential development, and a fig and a pine tree.

Probably due to the location of the William and George Pyke graves there, the golfcourse seems to have been regarded as the site of the original Pyke Station. Early maps however suggest that the homestead and associated complex of outbuildings was further east, on or beside land that was recently developed as a housing estate. Archaeological evidence of the Pyke station may remain in this area.

The town was always very small (c.200-300 until the modern era³²³), and there are now very few old houses surviving. Apart from The Willows historical complex, there are very few pre-mid twentieth century houses remaining in the town.

AITKENS GAP, OR THE GAP, OR BUTTLEJORRK

A settlement also grew at Aitken's Gap, which was one of the key stages of the trip to the gold-fields. It was still a wild place in 1858 when traveller William Kelly arrived by coach:-

'Arrived at the top, it was a scene of extraordinary bustle and uproar, for it was then a special camping place for drivers and carriers, and the scores upon scores of horse drays and bullock-wagons that were preparing for a start, produced an amount of tumult, altercation, blasphemy, and compound abominations which would not find many readers even if I succeeded in reproducing it.'324

Why this spot was a staging-post is not clear. Perhaps it had to do with the achievement of its summit, and the end of the long haul that finished the 'Keilor Plains' stage of the journey. No doubt a reputed spring of water, the branch of the Kororoit Creek, was vital. However, when John Chandler and his horses arrived there 'nearly famished' some years beforehand he had had to buy five buckets of water, at two shillings a bucket, at a shanty. 325

Hotels (the Gap Inn, the Manchester and the Bald Hill) and stores were erected in the vicinity, and in 1854 the Government moved to formalise the township. The original Gap Inn and a store (in which a post office was established in 1856) were located in the middle of the main

David Moloney

³²¹ Macdonald, op cit, pp.16-17

³²² **Note**: there may be other early maps of this site at the CPO or PROV.

³²³ Victorian Municipal Directories

³²⁴ Kelly, W. *Life in Victoria...1853...1858*, (facsimile ed., Lowden, Kilmore, 1977), p.169 (1858).

³²⁵ Chandler, op cit, p.78

street of the Government's later survey.³²⁶ As a result of the Licences Reduction Board the Bald Hill hotel was closed in the early twentieth century.³²⁷ Archaeological evidence remains of the Gap and Bald Hill inns. There were also burials behind the Aitkens Gap hotel; these may have been removed very early.



Milletts' Bald Hills Hotel, Aitkens Gap, date unknown. An underground tank marks the site today. (George Evans Museum, Sunbury)

In 1853 Aitken's Gap police station had been one of the first police stations established on the then lawless road to Mount Alexander. It had by far the largest forage requirement in the whole of the Bourke District, and stationed one sergeant and 6 police, indicative of its significance as a changing station for the gold escort. Together with most of the other wayside 1850s goldrush police stations, it was closed down in early 1863 after the railway was opened to Bendigo. By early 1864 most buildings (three portable buildings, and weatherboard stables were removed elsewhere, but the sturdy bluestone police lock-up had to remain. It survived in a deteriorated condition as a farm outbuilding until its removal and reconstruction in Sunbury in 1989. Its former site is now on a new house block; a bench associated with a former building appears to remain, along with a scatter of hand-made bricks that could have come from the chimney that had been added to it at a later date. It is likely that this site retains archaeological evidence of a seminal, ephemeral, and colourful event in Australia's history. It may constitute rare evidence of an inter-town police station, an integral part of the main goldrush roads.

As the Bendigo railway beyond Sunbury opened in stages from 1859, The Gap's fortunes dramatically reversed. It struggled on as a town serving a local farming community. A Church of England school opened at the settlement in 1857, and a state school continued until 1900.³³¹ In the 1990s no relic could be found of the Caroline Chisholm shelter shed that had been erected at the Gap during the gold rush.

³²⁶ SLV Map:-Vale Vol.4a Fol. 131(1854).

³²⁷ Lack, Ford, op cit, p.96

³²⁸ PROV, 'Police Stations Victoria, 1836-1965', Compiled by the Victoria Police

³²⁹ Personal conversation, Mr Charles Watson, 9/12//2005

³³⁰ PROV, VPRS937 Unit 50, 17/2/1859

³³¹ Blake, *op cit*, p.13

The remnants of the avenue of old Monterey Pines (*Pinus radiata*) on the Calder Highway is today the most prominent evidence of the former township. The pines could have been planted at any time between the 1870s and 1920s, probably as part of a Melton Shire town beautification policy. They are the same as those that survive on Gap Road and several of the streets of Sunbury that were once a part of Melton Shire. (They may also have been intended to mark Melton Shire's fragile control of this district.) In Victoria conifer plantings had been recommended for street planting in the 1860s, but from the 1880s they were often replaced by deciduous trees, and the Monterey Pines at Aitkens Gap are one of only a few stands of old conifer street plantings which remain in Victoria.³³²

DIGGERS REST

Although its goldrush origins were the same as those of Aitken's Gap and Melton, there had been no Government survey of Diggers Rest. The core of this hamlet (which later moved towards the railway station) was the Diggers Rest hotel, built on land already alienated by the Crown to 'Murphy and Ryan'. 333

When travel writer Mrs. Clacy's party crossed the Keilor Plains in 1852 they camped a 'respectful distance' from a canvas and timber coffee-shop, in view of the 'bad characters' usually found lounging around such places. This coffee-shop had been known to accommodate upwards of 40 people of a night. It probably became a hotel, perhaps the Robertson's or Diggers Rest Inn.



Diggers Rest Hotel today. The original structure of the building has been cloaked in interwar period dressings (including roof). (David Moloney)

Around the turn of the century, Batey recounted: 'William and Thomas Gregory began with a coffee shop at Diggers Rest, converted the same into a public house and then say about the

David Moloney

³³²Hawker, J, 'The Gap, Monterey Pine Avenue, Calder Highway', (Report, Ministry of Planning and Development, 23/6/1994).

³³³ Parish Plan, Section 9, Parish of Holden.

³³⁴ Clacy, C. A Lady's Visit To The Gold Diggings Of Australia In 1852-53, (Landsdowne, Melbourne, 1963), pp.34-5.

beginning of '53 sold to Speary.'³³⁵ (Apparently this 'coffee shop' had originally been established in 1852 by adjacent squatters the Page brothers.³³⁶) According to Batey, the next year, 1854, Speary built 'the present Diggers Rest hotel'. This hotel had 'very commodious stables of brick' at which three coaches changed daily.³³⁷ William Speary (who was implicated in a substantial local cattle duffing network) also built the nearby Monmouthshire hotel, where the first Melton Shire Council meeting was held in 1871.³³⁸ Until at least 1910 Melton Council meetings were rotated between Melton, Toolern Vale and Diggers Rest.³³⁹ After the goldrush the Monmouthshire became a well-known sportsmans venue (with a gun club, and perhaps also through association with Diggers Rest coursing), but, after serving as a shearing shed in its latter years, was recently demolished as part of VicRoads' freeway overpass works.

Much later, Batey recalled the Diggers Rest hotel in its roaring days:

'The crowd at the counter was three if not four deep, the landlord with a brace of assistants drew liquor as fast as possible which those in the front rank passed to those behind. The outsiders on giving the orders threw their shillings over the heads of those that stood before them.' 340

In the 1890s its name was changed to 'the Oval', in commemoration of the Diggers Rest football team's memorable 13 point defeat of Collingwood at an oval in front of the hotel.³⁴¹ The hotel has had many alterations over the years, the most important being an early twentieth century facelift (including a new roof), which reflects the revival of Mount Alexander Road in the wake of the advent of the motor car. It remains essentially the 1854 building, and is now a rare example of a goldrush wayside hotel.

As with the nearby Gap hotel, a cemetery developed near the Diggers Rest hotel.³⁴² In the early twentieth century there were '...nine graves in a row outside of the plot of ground that Speary held of Murphy'. These included that of JA Sanger of the USA: 'A headstone was erected to his memory, but as no person knew his grave it was place on the top end of the row.' This headstone has since been replicated and, together with the remains (after cremation), moved into a township park. The fate of the other graves is not known.

In 1910 the Victorian Municipal Directory lists Diggers Rest as a separate township for the first time, noting its 'station, three hotels'. By 1914 it was listed as having two hotels, and in 1919 only one. The reduction from three to one was the upshot of the purge by the Licences Reduction Board. By 1915 it had acquired a chaff mill and a weighbridge, both gone at the end of the Second World War. In 1922 a 'Mechanics Institute' was listed for the first time. 345

The local historical society has restored the weatherboard Diggers Rest school room. The first Diggers Rest schools were situated on the Bulla-Diggers Rest Road, despite lobbying from

³³⁵ Batey, RHSV, op cit, p.43

³³⁶ Bilszta, J? 'Diggers Rest', unpublished typescript, MDHS. (The reference should probably be to the Page brothers of *Glencoe*, rather than the Brodie brothers.)

³³⁷ *ibid*, pp.50, 103, 108. Batey appears to call this 'the Oval' hotel, although once he refers to 'Locks Oval Diggers Rest hotel', so it may have been another now non-extant hotel.

³³⁸ Batey, *op.cit.*, pp.103-4.

³³⁹ Victorian Municipal Directories

³⁴⁰*ibid*, p 53.

³⁴¹ Watson, op cit

³⁴² Batey, RHSV, op.cit., p.51

³⁴³ *ibid*, pp.43, 50, 51

³⁴⁴ Lack, Ford, *op cit*, p.96

³⁴⁵ Victorian Municipal Directories

farmers in the Melton side of Mt Alexander Road, whose own Kororoit school was hovering on the brink of closure. In 1882 these schools were amalgamated into a new school No.2479 Diggers Rest, using the former No.1933 Kororoit building. In 1888 this was shifted again to the Diggers Rest station site. In 1960 another room was added; perhaps an indication of new (post World War Two) Soldier Settlement farms in the district. This has now been removed.

Three memorials have now been erected alongside the school building to commemorate Sanger, Caroline Chisholm's Shed, and Houdini's Diggers Rest flight.



Diggers Rest State School 4312, c.1932 (Werribee and District Historical Society)

TOOLERN VALE

Explorers and early settlers had passed through the area in travelling between the Geelong, Bacchus Marsh and Sunbury districts. The first marked track to the area was from Keilor to the *Green Hills* station, and then to Bullengarook beyond. During the goldrush this became part of an alternative route to Gisborne, via the 'Break-neck'. Its steepness was not popular with bullockies however, and no shanty or hotel is known to have established in the area. After farm settlement in the 1850s, the district and town were known as Green Hills (a church had been built on *Greenhills* station to service the district before the establishment of the Toolern township), then Yangardook, Toolern, and finally Toolern Vale.

From the time of Crown land sales in the 1850s Toolern Vale proved a rich and well populated farming district. There were 81 children living within a two mile radius of the Yangardook School No.946 when it opened in 1869.³⁴⁸ In 1875 its name was changed to Toolern, and changed again in 1931 to Toolern Vale.³⁴⁹ Both the school and teachers residence were bluestone. In 1914 the residence had been condemned; its bluestone was used

³⁴⁶ Blake, op cit, pp.67-68

³⁴⁷ *ibid*, pp.88-89

³⁴⁸ Toolern Vale State School: A Centenary History 1869-1969 (Toolern Vale State School Centenary Committee, 1969), p.6; Parish Plans: 'Township of Toolern Vale'; Starr, *op cit*, p.180 ³⁴⁹ Blake, *op cit*, p.51

to build a bridge across the Kororoit Creek, and its iron and timber were used to build Frank Ryan's house.3

In 1880 there was a blacksmith in the town, which was on a popular stock route.³⁵¹ The 'Toolern Vale Free Library had been in existence for a number of years', and people were thinking of building a Mechanics Institute soon. 352



Toolern Vale Store. (Later destroyed in the March 1965 bushfire.)

Around 1884 it was reported that Toolern consisted of 2 or 3 private buildings, a blacksmith shop and 3 public buildings. There was a Weslyan church and a Mechanics Institute nearing completion. This brick Mechanics Institute was at that time the largest public building in the Melton district.³⁵³ In 1889 the town 'Toolern' was first mentioned in the Victorian Municipal Directory as a '...small postal village.' By 1890 the Melton Shire Council was holding alternate meetings at Toolern, which may have inspired one partisan local to design a radical new Shire town hall to be located at Toolern (it was octagonal, surmounted by a flag pole). His offer was not taken up. 354 In the 1890s a Toolern Railway League was trying to obtain a railway through the area.³

By 1894 the Victorian Municipal Directory description of 'Toolern' - 'mechanics institute and a good free library, also church and school' - remained virtually unaltered throughout the twentieth century. In 1905 the town was called 'Toolern Vale' for the first time in the Directory. 356 In 1896 Toolern, population 20, had acquired a creamery; in 1925 'dairying' was included in the industries of the area for the first time. Apparently two creameries were

David Moloney

³⁵⁰ Blake, op cit, p.51; Starr, op cit, p.187

³⁵¹ Toolern Vale School Centenary History, *op cit*, p.10; Macdonald, *op cit*, p.11 ³⁵² Macdonald, *op cit*, p.11

Macdonald, op cit, p.13. Starr, p.174, says that the first service of the 'brick, with a shingle roof' Weslyan chapel was held on 31st August 1873.

³⁵⁴ Victorian Municipal Directory; Macdonald, op cit, p.13

³⁵⁵ Macdonald, op cit, p.13

³⁵⁶ Victorian Municipal Directories

established near the town³⁵⁷; nothing now remains of them. Toolern played tennis against other teams in the Melton region.³⁵⁸

The township was nearly completely wiped out in a devastating fire of March 1965. Only three of 18 houses in the village escaped the flames, and 14 were destroyed. The post office, general store, school, mechanic's institute and church were also destroyed. The school and its 1930 pine plantation were destroyed, and only vestiges of the original school site, such as the quarry from which the bluestone was obtained, the school bell, the odd early tree and possibly an underground tank, survive. The present timber building was erected 1966. There is also a new (Mechanics') hall and store.

It is significant that a rose garden memorial dedicated to the 'memory of valued community members' of Toolern Vale is situated at the CFA truck depot. The names on the memorial are deceased townspeople who played a leading role in the community groups that bound the town together: the CFA, school, tennis club, hall and kindergarten.³⁶¹

ROCKBANK

To the north of the eventual township, the Rockbank Inn on Beattys Road was established to cater for goldrush travellers. (It had originally been the homestation of WC Yuille's original Rockbank estate.)

Despite the dominance of the Clarke estate, the Rockbank - Mount Atkinson area became home to small farmers in the 1850s, growing and selling hay and dairy produce in Melbourne. In about 1861 there is evidence that the Cropley family conducted a general store at Rockbank. It was not a thriving area, and in the 1870s the Cropleys left to settle in Gippsland.³⁶²



Rockbank Inn, the founding building in Rockbank (1854), now ruinous. Photo taken by Arthur Beatty in 1938 (M&DHS)

³⁵⁷ Leo Tarleton, pers.conv.

³⁵⁸ Lack, Ford, *op cit*, p.96

³⁵⁹ Starr, op cit, p.214

³⁶⁰ Blake, *op cit*, p.51

³⁶¹ Trevor McNair, personal conversation, 31/8/06

³⁶² Starr, *op cit*, p.132

The opening up of more land by the Crown under the 1860s Selection Acts provided impetus to community building. In 1868 the 'New Cambridge' Common School opened.³⁶³ A local Missen family member looking back on the late nineteenth century wrote:

'The old school was built of stone carted by the local people. It was called 'New Cambridge' Number 919. There were a lot of children going then...There were a lot of houses about then and large families, and that was the only school near them.' 364

In 1884, Keilor Road Station school (No.1641) operated half-time with New Cambridge (No.919) until 1886 when Keilor Road was closed. In 1906 the name of the school changed to Rockbank.³⁶⁵ A residence was built in 1934.³⁶⁶

In about 1871 a Mr Quale had a smithy, and some of the residents were trying to get a post office. It was thought that these would be the nucleus of a township known generally as Rockbank, but by some as New Cambridge.³⁶⁷ At the same time Mr G Missen received a licence for the Rose and Crown hotel in Rockbank. A Missen diarist commented on the Rockbank hotel (a competitor):

'Beaty's down on the creek was called a beer-house, and the bullock drivers used to go that way through to Keilor Road Station...'

In the early 1960s the Rose and Crown was still standing as a private residence. As a result of vandalism over recent decades the isolated Rockbank Inn is now a ruin.

In 1871 WJ Clarke was elected to Melton Shire Council, and in a few years became President: 'The roads to Rockbank benefitted accordingly, and a small village came into existence. By 1872 it even merited a Post Office.' The building of the bridge over the Kororoit Creek in Deer Park in 1878 finally put Rockbank on the main route to Ballarat. 370

No doubt the opening of the Ballarat railway in the 1880s benefitted the town. It required considerable earthworks through Keatings Swamp. It may also have been instrumental in the establishment of the coursing ground at Rockbank.³⁷¹

In 1922 the Rockbank 'Mechanics Institute' (the present hall) appeared in the Victorian Municipal Directory for the first time. In 1923 a 'sports and coursing grounds' was included among the towns attributes. In the late 1920s and 30s the town had a quarry and two chaff mills, but the coursing ground had disappeared. At the same time the Licencing Reduction Board had closed down the Rose & Crown hotel. 373

The town also hosted several large radio receiving stations. The opening of the AWA international Beam Radio receiving station in 1927 was an event of national significance. Locally it added to the demands for reticulated water, and local recreational facilities

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<sup>363</sup> Blake, op cit, pp.50-51
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³⁶⁴ Starr, op cit, p.117

³⁶⁵ Blake, *op cit*, p.72

³⁶⁶ Blake, *op cit*, pp.50-51; Starr, *op cit*. p.180

³⁶⁷ Macdonald, op cit, p.9

³⁶⁸ Starr, op cit, p.117

³⁶⁹ Clarke (1995), op cit, p.45

³⁷⁰ Bilszta, J 'The First Shire Council', unpublished typescript (MDHS, nd)

³⁷¹ Victorian Municipal Directories, 1919

³⁷² Victorian Municipal Directories

³⁷³ Lack, Ford, op cit, p.96

(including tennis courts). The other was a Defence force radio station whose construction (with its sister station at Diggers Rest) was initiated by the United States forces, whose Pacific headquarters were in Melbourne, as part of an international radio link in the aftermath of Pearl Harbour. Both the Rockbank and Diggers Rest stations were completed by the Australian Department of Defence after the theatre of the Pacific War moved northwards after the May and June 1942 battles of the Coral Sea and Midway. From the 1960s an estate of small brick Defence Department houses was erected on the Highway.

In 1962 the town had a barley depot, but this was gone by 1978.³⁷⁴

MELTON SOUTH (FORMERLY MELTON RAILWAY STATION, AND EXFORD)

The establishment of a settlement of Melton South was driven by the opening of the railway in 1884. This subsequently prompted a number of industries, initially sawmills, and in the early twentieth century, chaff mills. This development coincided with the Exford 'Closer Settlement' estate, which boosted local population and produce.

In 1910 the community built the large timber 'Victoria Hall', which became the focus of community life for several generations. The 'Melton Railway School' commenced in this hall in 1911.³⁷⁵ It was a 'prep' school, with older students attending Melton. The schools separated in 1923, and in 1925 Melton South No. 3717 school had its own brick building. A teachers residence was purchased in 1923.³⁷⁶

By about 1912 Melton South had a boarding house (probably for chaff or sawmill employees), store, and small church. The Melton Valley Golf Club originated near the railway station; it was officially declared open by Mr H Staughton, President, on 11th June 1927. In 1932 the club moved to the present Melton links.³⁷⁷

Victoria Hall, neglected and vandalised, was demolished in 1992. Like the Melton Mechanics Institute, it had been handed back to the Council on condition that it be replaced by a new hall, with the same name, and commemorated by a plaque.³⁷⁸ Apart from the 1923 brick school building,³⁷⁹ and the railway station, no other principal early Melton South public sites now survive.

³⁷⁴ Victorian Municipal Directories

Anna Curry 'Victoria Hall' (Community Development Theory and Practice essay, 1993), pp.1-2

³⁷⁶ Blake, *op cit*, pp.121-122

³⁷⁷ Johnson, op cit

³⁷⁸ Curry, *op cit*, pp.4-5

³⁷⁹ 'Melton South Primary School No.3717 Diamond Jubilee 1923-1983'



Victoria Hall (demolished) (Melton & District Historical Society)

Few early residential sites remain. Those in Brooklyn Street, including the mill manager's house, have been demolished, although an old weatherboard house has been moved there (from High Street). The row of railway houses (station master, gangers etc) has been demolished. There are a few post Second World War owner-built brick houses on Exford Road, and a row of Bill Pitson's weatherboard houses on Staughton Street, probably built post-war. There are a few early twentieth century houses between Melton South and Exford, but no evidence has been found of any of the corrugated iron sheds that were provided for English migrants brought to the estate by the Government c.1912 and again after the First World War. These were used as accommodation until houses were built; it is possible that one survives as a garage or shed.

7. SMALL SETTLEMENTS

The small communities that were established by farmers usually centred around the need to provide schooling for their children. Sometimes they built a church. Only archaeological traces of such sites could be expected to remain.

DJERRIWARRH CREEK / DJERRIWARRH (DEEP CREEK)

The Crown sold farming allotments along the southern reaches of Djerriwarrh Creek in 1855. Roadworks associated with the new sandstone bridge may also have encouraged settlement. Settlers began clearing Mallee to establish small holdings, principally growing fruit and vegetables. Received the southern reaches of Djerriwarrh Creek in 1855. Roadworks associated with the new sandstone bridge may also have encouraged settlement.

Petitioning for a school at Djerriwarrh began in 1865, as the nearby children had to travel to Melton. School No.1635 was opened in 1867. In 1875 a new wooden school, with

³⁸⁰ Other old houses include that on the corner of Station St and the railway line (the 1923 teachers residence?); and Ronnie Robertsons at the end of Brooklyn Road. Staughton's 1910 'White Gate' was taken away from Brooklyn Road.

³⁸¹ Parish Plans, Parish of Djerriwarrh

³⁸² Bilszta, J 'Djerriwarrh', unpublished typescript (MDHS, nd)

accommodation for 60 children, was opened. It closed in 1925.³⁸³ The school, is known to have been extant until recently, was on the western side of the creek, in the Shire of Moorabool.³⁸⁴

There was originally a tollgate on the east bank of road down to the creek, but it was removed in the 1870s, and no trace of this is known to survive. There are also thought to have been two hotels nearby in the goldrush period. The remains of a site, constituting a depression with old bricks and artefacts, remains near the top of the escarpment. This may have been the Ben Nevis hotel.

Many of the few early houses and all the fences in the Djerriwarrh-West Melton area were destroyed in a bushfire in January 1985.

Mount Cottrell

The history of this former school is unclear, and its exact location is not known. If found, it might provide scarce evidence of an early denominational school, probably associated with English small farmers.

Blake records that 'early schools in this area' included 'the Derrimut Church of England School at the foot of Mt Cotterell.'385 Starr however relates that the Mt Cottrell school was conducted in the Weslyan church in the 1860s.³⁸⁶ She records that Mt Cottrell school was 'a substantial bluestone building' (1864-1898), with a nearby teachers residence, on land owned by the Weslyan church. It reopened in a leased building in 1921 after being closed since 1898, and finally closed in 1949.³⁸⁷



Mount Cottrell State School 804. Scholars in 1940. (Werribee and District Historical Society)

³⁸³ Blake, op cit, p.72; also Macdonald, op cit, p.10

³⁸⁴ Bilszta (Djerriwarrh), op cit.

³⁸⁵ Blake, *op cit*, pp.66-67

³⁸⁶ Starr, op cit, p.178

³⁸⁷ See also Blake, op cit, p.49

This was apparently the Mt Cottrell No.804 school that Blake describes as having been 8 miles north of Werribee and 3 miles south-east of Exford, which would put it either on Mt Cottrell or Faulkners Rds, at the southern foot of Mt Cottrell. In one place Blake says that it opened in 1921. Elsewhere he states that it may have been working part-time with the Mt Atkinson school in 1887, so perhaps it had taken over from the former Church of England or Weslyan denominational school. (Elsewhere again Blake records that Mt Cottrell No.804 was working half time with Exford school in 1904, and that it closed in 1910 and yet again, that it was working part time with the Parwan South (Nerowie) school in 1927-29.

Education Department records researched by Olwen Ford indicate that the original school was on the south side of Boundary Road (not in the Shire), and later on Dukelows Road. 392

MOUNT ATKINSON

The Rockbank district was known as Mount Atkinson in the nineteenth century.³⁹³ Starr relates that the Mt Atkinson school was established in 1867, and that its closure in 1873 forced 'North Pywheitjorrk parents' to send children 'the substantial distance' to School No.919 at Rockbank. When it reopened in 1884 all the Pywheitjorrk parents except one had left the district.³⁹⁴

Blake records that Common School No.963 opened in 1868 with an attendance of 24, and closed 1870. It may have operated part time with SS 804 Mt Cotterell in 1887. 395

Starr records that in the early 1890s the Education Department was negotiating with Sir WJ Clarke regarding purchase of land for a new school half way between Rockbank and Mt Atkinson. This was not proceeded with.³⁹⁶

The exact location of the former Mt Atkinson school is not known, but it would appear to have been in the vicinity of Neales Road (Rockbank Middle Road). Archaeological remnants may remain.

KOROROIT

In 1862 Catholic School No.362 was established on Kororoit Creek '3.5 miles from Diggers Rest, and 4 miles from Toolern Vale'. Presumably this was 'RC Church Site' Reserve gazetted in the 1860s at the Coimadai-Holden Road crossing of Kororoit Creek. It was a tiny shingle roofed wooden building. Attendance gradually declined from the initial 35, and the school closed in 1875 when the supervisor could not obtain a

³⁸⁸ Blake, *op cit*, p.49

³⁸⁹ Blake, *op cit*, p.51

³⁹⁰ Blake, *op cit*, p. 113

³⁹¹ Blake, *op cit*, p.137.

³⁹² Olwen Ford, pers. conv.; Ford, O 'Voices From Below: Family, School and Community on the Braybrook Plains 1854 1892' (Master of Education Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1993); Maps, PROV: VPRS 795, SS804:- 1900; 1903/5667; 1910/5746.

³⁹³ Starr, op cit, p.115

³⁹⁴ Starr, *op cit*, p.176

³⁹⁵ Blake, *op cit*, p.51

³⁹⁶ Starr, op cit, p.178

³⁹⁷ Olwen Ford, pers. conv.

³⁹⁸ Blake, *op cit*, pp. 31, 77; Starr, *op cit*, pp.174-5

³⁹⁹ Parish Plan, Parish of Yangardook.

teacher (probably because denominational schools became self-funding at this time, when this provision of the 1872 Education Act was implemented). A few years later the school was destroyed by fire.

The district was without a school until agitation resulted in the opening of school No.1933 Kororoit in 1877. This was 'a portable school with quarters'. For five years it was continually in danger of being closed or worked part-time with 919 New Cambridge (Rockbank) or 1447 Diggers Rest. In 1882 it was permanently closed. The building was moved to the new site of School No.1447 on the Diggers Rest - Bulla Road. But this distant location was controversial, and in 1888 the Kororoit people were successful in having the school moved to the Diggers Rest Station site, where it remained.

The land upon which the former Kororoit Catholic and State schools were constructed remains a Crown Reserve. The stumps and plantings associated with the church school survived at least into the 1930s, although nothing would appear to remain today. Although the early Melton Shire was unusual in that the majority of its population was Irish Catholic, few seem to have been landholders. This particular district however was the only one with a predominance of Irish names among the Crown grantees.

Both the Catholic and State schools had been located in a picturesque Water Reserve beside the Kororoit Creek. The only substantial fabric remaining on the site would appear to be the long abandoned bluestone and timber bridges and road cutting through the reserve.

Truganina (Derrimut)

Most of the village of Truganina was situated just across the southern boundary of the Shire. It was a small island of settlers surrounded by large estates, principally Clarke to the north, Chirnside to the south, and the Mt Derrimut estate to the east.



Built in 1862 of corrugated iron, bought by the Presbyterian church in 1907 and still in use in 1962. Destroyed in the fires of 1969. (Werribee and District Historical Society)

Most of the community buildings - state school, Weslyan chapel, and Baptist church (later Presbyterian) - were to the south of Boundary Road and the Shire. However the

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⁴⁰⁰ Mary Tolhurst, pers. conv.

⁴⁰¹ Eg, Pollitt, op cit, p.40; Peel, op cit, pp.67-71

community incorporated Melton Shire residents, including the families of Duncan and Robert D Hopkins, and George Missen. 402

Some buildings were within the study area. In 1859 John Corr's school at the foot of Mt Cottrell was the first organised school in the Derrimut-Truganina district. 403 An 1892 map also shows the 'Derrimut Post Office' on the Melton side of Boundary Road. 404 (Truganina was originally known as Derrimut. 405)

Also on the Melton side of Boundary Road, on Hopkins Road opposite RD Hopkins' house, was a sly-grog shanty. 406 As non-conformist religion was strong among local farmers it is more likely that its clientelle had been early bullockies and travellers to the diggings. Mary Missen had noted that:-

"...old bullock tracks went right past the house [in Rockbank] and by Mt Atkinson through to Truganina. They used to carry goods from Bendigo and Ballarat.' She wrote (sometime after 1939) that these tracks are 'still visible in grass paddocks'. 407 Stones from the Hopkins Road hotel are said to have been used to build Hopkins' Rocklands homestead opposite. Extensive archaeological evidence of the hotel site remains.408



1873 Baptist Chapel Poster (M&DHS)

⁴⁰² Murray, E, *The Plains of Iramoo* (self published, Geelong, 1974), pp.7,8,98-105

⁴⁰³ ibid, p.98; this would appear to originally have been a Church of England 'denominational school'. The Derrimut-Truganina school was established in 1859 (Blake, LJ (ed) Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria, Vol.3 (Education Department of Victoria, 1973), p.66 (also pp.49, 113, 137)). ⁴⁰⁴ SLV Map 821A (1892)

⁴⁰⁵ Blake, *op cit*, p.22

⁴⁰⁶ Murray, op cit, p.98

⁴⁰⁷ Starr, op cit, pp.115, 121

⁴⁰⁸ Wendy Bitans, pers. conv.

The January 1968 fires left few buildings standing in the Truganina area; even the bluestone school exploded in the heat. It is possible but unlikely that evidence survives of the post office. Evidence of the ford on Boundary Road over Skeleton Creek may survive.

EXFORD

Although it apparently retains no historic fabric, the Exford school consitutes evidence of the early twentieth century break-up of the large estates. In 1902 School No.3423 opened in a new wooden building on land leased from HW Staughton, on the north side of the Exford Road, about 1.5 km west of the Werribee River bridge. In 1904 it worked half-time with Mt Cotterell, and went full time in 1910 when Mount Cotterell closed. In 1950, with 21 children, it was working 3 days per week, but it is not known when in closed.

There are a few early twentieth century farm-houses surviving in this area, some significantly modified. There are a few former farm-houses that now comprise just a chimney or an underground tank. Some may date to earlier houses of Exford estate workers.

· Sydenham West

The subdivision of the *Overnewton* and *Rockbank* pastoral estates led to the development of Sydenham West. A Progress Association, and cricket and football clubs were established, and a public hall became a popular place for dances in the district.⁴¹¹

School No.3862 on the north-west corner of Leakes and Keilor Roads Rockbank, opened in 1914, was also a product of the break-up of the pastoral estates. The school was destroyed by fire in 1945, but locals quickly purchased a nearby unused house and shifted it to the school site. This private home (known as Aitkins) was in turn replaced in 1955, and this 'old 'school house' once again became a family residence. The school was still operating in 1973. 412

The school building has now been removed. Its site, constituting tree plantings, concrete slabs, paths etc, is evidence of the development of the area in the wake of the break-up of the pastoral estates.

. Melton Park

After World War One the balance of this 4000 acre estate was subdivided into 13 soldier settler farms. From 1920 the former servicemen began lobbying for a school, but two families left late in 1920, stalling the petition. In 1928 School No.4412 opened in a room of a cottage whose internal walls were lined with papered hessian. Early in 1929 it worked part time with School No.4175 Parwan South, the teacher travelling the 15 miles on bad roads between schools on alternate day. It was back full-time later that year, but closed in 1945 due to poor enrolments. 413

There are few soldier settlement farm-houses left in the area.

⁴⁰⁹ Defence Ordnance Maps, op cit, 1916, 1938

⁴¹⁰ Blake, *op cit*, pp.112-113

⁴¹¹ Lack, Ford, op cit, p.94

⁴¹² Blake, op cit, pp.124-125

⁴¹³ Starr, op cit, pp.189-190; Blake, op cit, pp. 147-148

8 EARLY PRIVATE SUBDIVISIONS

Travelling on the badly marked road from Geelong to Melbourne in 1854 William Westgarth encountered only 7 people (most near Melbourne). But he 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 skeptical:- '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.' But many of the speculators in the Melton area were not content to let their blocks purchased from the Crown 'lie', and instead conjured up audacious schemes to expedite and increase their returns. The subdivision schemes recorded below are likely to be only some of those in Melton Shire that were offered to the public.

If, as some proposed, their intention was to facilitate the establishment of small yeoman farmers, these 'estate' floats proved utter failures. The failure of most was such that only the barest fragments of their histories, and apparently nothing of any actual development, remain now.

It is highly likely that many purchasers of the small rural and township blocks so created would themselves have been aspiring speculators. The soaring land values of the goldrush years would have encouraged the sale of these blocks, especially so called 'township' and 'village' blocks, to these smaller potential speculators. Many appear to have bought their properties on the strength of the representation of the 'developer', without having bothered to actually visit the properties. The boom amplified every whisper from each vaguely plausible source to an urgent din that many urban professionals and small businessmen presumably found difficult to ignore.

It is notable that all of the most speculative 'estates' and 'townships' created were situated in the parishes of Pywheitjorrk and Derrimut, two very dry and flat parishes, with inferior soil, that proved the least suitable land for small farming in the Shire. As the years passed they invariably ended up as part of the Clarke family's Rockbank pastoral estate.

Most subdivisions were clustered around the Greigs Road and the Western Highway, both major goldfields roads in the 1850s. Others were located further south, near or on Boundary Road, which via Staughton's Bridge over the Werribee River, was a lesser route to the goldfields.

No fabric is known to remain in any of these subdivisions that might date to these original subdivisions and sales. There are a few dry stone walls located in what was the supposed 'Village of Surrey', but these are likely boundary walls associated with the later Rockbank estate.

· Western Highway, west of Hopkins and Sinclair Roads.

Although we have no name for it, this was one of the largest estates floated. Probably in the 1850s, and certainly prior to the building of the Ballarat Railway in 1884, the whole 301 acres, 3 roods and 10 perches of Crown Allotments 5 and 6, Portion 25, Parish of Derrimut, was cut up into 88 one and two acre blocks, with four larger (5-8 acre) blocks reserved on strategic corners, probably for civic or commercial purposes. The land was strategically placed, straddling the road 'to Ballarat' (the Western Highway), north of the

⁴¹⁴ Cited in Lack, Ford, op cit, p.30

road 'to Buninyong' (Greigs Road), which was an alternative road to Ballarat, and south of the Government Road 'to Keilor' (Rockbank Middle Road). 415

Five new roads were created in the subdivision, none of which survive today, so it is unlikely that very many blocks were sold. The land had been purchased from the Crown in May 1854 by 'J O'Grady & W Craig'. ⁴¹⁶ W Craig, apparently a professional of some sort (having offices at Russell Street Melbourne), commissioned the plan of the subdivision. ⁴¹⁷

· Western Highway Subdivision, east of Hopkins Road.

Algernon Lindsay, 'victualler', and James Moxham, 'auctioneer', both of Williamstown, subdivided Parts 2 and 3 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 each. They acquired the land from the Crown in May 1854, and by May 1855 had commenced selling 5 acre blocks for up to £26 each. Most purchasers purchased multiple blocks. Most of them were fellow Williamstownites, such as Andrew Wauchope 'pilot', John Wright 'butcher', Charles Herman, 'waterpoliceman', Henry Jones 'jeweller', and William Baldwin 'labourer'. Virtually all the purchasers resold to WJT Clarke within 3 or 4 years, usually at about half the price they had paid, although some received even less than this. A few others limited their losses by selling to other similarly unsuspecting small businessmen/professionals; in July 1859 one such victim – Melbourne chemist James Blair – on-sold his 8 allotments to WJT Clarke for £40 just 3 months after having paid £80 for them. Presumably he visited the allotments after he had purchased them.

⁴¹⁵ State Library of Victoria, Vale Collection, Vol.4, p.78 (nd)

⁴¹⁶ Parish Plan, Parish of Derrimut.

⁴¹⁷ State Library of Victoria, Vale Collection, Vol.4, p.78 (nd)

⁴¹⁸ VPRS 460/P/35850 (Torrens Application 35850). Various indentures.

⁴¹⁹ *ibid*, conveyances, 14/4/1859, 11/7/1859



Part of the Plan of Subdivision for the Ballarat and Greigs Road Estate (PROV, VPRS 460/P/35850)

Greigs Road Subdivision.

Trustees of the 'The Colonial Freehold Land Society' (John Hodson, Charles Vaughan and John Browning, all 'Gentlemen' of Melbourne) subdivided a 136 acre allotment on the south side of Greigs Road, about 400 metres west of the railway line, into at least 12 allotments, and began selling them at about £43 each. The only known purchasers on-sold to WJ Clarke in the 1870s and 1880s, of course at great losses. Other purchasers may simply have forfeited their properties.

JC Clinchy:- 'The Village of Surrey'

'Melbourne Gentleman' Joseph Charles Clinchy subdivided at least three c.100 acre allotments which had been purchased from the Crown by William Byrne, 'Melbourne Civil Engineer' and sold to Clinchy. Two of these subdivisions were on or near Boundary Road in the south of the Shire, while the allotments 'better known as the Village of Surrey' was 'on the road to Buninyong'. The 'village' was established on part of Portion 2, Section 23, Parish of Derrimut – on the south side of the Western Highway, opposite Clarkes Road. It is not known if the adjacent Portion 3, also purchased from the Crown by Byrne, was also subdivided in this way. Of only two records found of the sale of allotments in the Village of Surrey; one was only ¾ of an acre in size so it is possible that scores of allotments were created in this subdivision. The entire subdivision ended up as part of the Rockbank pastoral estate.

⁴²⁰ ibid, conveyance, 17/8/1863.

The 'Township of North Uxbridge': Greigs Road

This was situated on the south side of Greigs Road, some 500 metres east of Faulkners Road (Portion 5 of Section 18, Parish of Pywheitjorrk). Thomas Henry Jones, 'of Melbourne, Gentleman', who appears to have been a serial subdivider, had purchased the c.100 acre allotment from the Crown in February 1854. He then created at least 38 small allotments on streets including Peel and Catherine Streets. ⁴²¹ The land ended up in the ownership of the Clarke empire, and no fabric is known to survive of any early development.

Faulkners Road Subdivision

This was situated on the east side of Faulkners Road, approximately 600 metres north of Boundary Road, Mount Cotterell. The property – Crown Portion 3, Section 3, Parish of Pywheitjorrk – was a c.100 acre allotment purchased from the Crown by TH (Thomas Henry) Jones. There are records of at least 7 sales of the subdivision, which were all sold by Jones to purchasers in the 1850s, and most were then sold by these purchasers to WJT Clarke in the 1860s (two are recorded as being sold to Sir WJ Clarke in the 1880s). James Gorrie 'labourer of Gardiners Creek' was one of these. He was stung twice by gentlemen, firstly by Jones, to whom he is recorded as paying £37.8.0 for two allotments (on 'Agar Street' and 'Farm Road'), and secondly by Sir WJ Clarke, MLC, who 27 years later paid Gorrie just £17 for these two allotments and another 14 that he had purchased in another Jones subdivision. It is unlikely that the Faulkners Road subdivision was ever farmed at this time.

· The 'Township of Staughtonville'

At this stage nothing is known of the 'Township of Staughtonville' other than it was situated 'near' and to the west of TH Jones' Faulkners Road subdivision. It may have been the 90 acre subdivision west of Faulkners Road that was ultimately acquired by the Misses Smith of *Strathtulloh*. Most owners simply threw their titles away, and their land was eventually acquired by neighbours through laws of adverse possession.⁴²⁴

JC Clinchy Subdivision: Boundary Road

Four (of at least 21) allotments of approximately 7 acres each were subdivided by JC Clinchy. While one record shows that they were sold by JF McMullan, 'Union Bank Inspector' to WJT Clarke in 1863, another record shows that by 1892 they were not in Clarke family ownership. 425

· JC Clinchy Subdivision: off Boundary Road

Approximately 1.5 kilometres west, on the east side of Hopkins Road some 600 metres north of Boundary Road, JC Clinchy subdivided another William Byrne Crown purchase: Crown Portion 3, Section 2 Parish of Derrimut. At least 17 allotments are known to have

⁴²¹ ibid

⁴²² PROV 460/P/35380 (Torrens Application 35850). Various indentures.

⁴²³ PROV 460/P/35380 (Torrens Application 35850). Various indentures including conveyances 26/6/1854 and 11/1/1888.

⁴²⁴ Mr John Morton, personal conversation, 16/8/2006

⁴²⁵ *ibid*, also Shire Map Series, Parish of Derrimut, 1892.

been subdivided; but as these allotments approximately 4 acres each, and the allotment over 100 acres, it is likely that several dozen allotments were created. 426

· The 'Township of Middleton, Pywheitjorrk'

All that has been found of the 'Township of Middleton' is a very early looking plan of a 'Block 9', being 1 acre 2 perches and 18.5 roods in area. It was bounded on three sides by Margaret Street, George Street, and Cork Street. None of these streets is known to survive today and, other that it was in the Parish of Pywheitjorrk, the location of this 'township' is unknown.

· The Victoria Freehold Land Society Estate

Although probably the most plausible of these speculative developments, in that the land was good and each subdivided farming allotment had water frontage, the blocks were excessively narrow (eg, c.1.6 kilometres long, and 60 metres wide) and apparently unworkable; they were shortly resubdivided and amalgamated. Many if not most purchasers sold out at less than half the price they had paid, some within just 12 months of their purchases. Stephen Tidgey paid the Victorian Freehold Land Society £343 for his allotment, and managed to off-load it for £140.

The subdivision was undertaken on Section 22 Parish of Kororoit (north of Melton Highway, west of Leakes Road to Kororoit Creek) by its Crown purchasers: 'T Fulton & Others'. This was the 'Victoria Freehold Land Society', owned by prominent Victorians Thomas Fulton, Lauchlan MacKinnon and Frederick James Sargood. They subdivided the land into 24 long very narrow allotments obviously to provide creek access to each. The allotments were sold, apparently to small speculators such as a Melbourne 'gentleman', but also to such as Walter Powell 'ironmonger' (perhaps a connection of engineer Thomas Fulton). Because this was good land with water, it appears to have ended up in the hands of genuine farmers such as Frederick Newnham and Michael Moylan. However the subdivided blocks were sold in packages of at least 2 or 3 adjacent allotments; the original subdividers had been greedy at the expense of the viability of the farms they were selling.

Another notable scam occurred about a kilometre south of Boundary Road (in the Shire of Wyndham) when township allotments were sold in England on the basis of a plan of subdivision with roads and a non-existent railway line. 430

This history had obviously been forgotten when, 100 years later, an almost identical state of affairs occurred with the Rosedale Estate, Chartwell (commonly known as the 'Chartwell Estate'). This 1957 subdivision of 491 township sized allotments is situated on the eastern corner of Boundary Road and Downing Street (Crown Allotment 5, Section 4, Parish of Pywheitjorrk).

The English mansion *Chartwell*, best known for its twentieth century ownership by Sir Winston Churchill, overlooks the 'The Weald of Kent': a rolling green woodland. If the name Chartwell was meant to inspire images of such British landscapes, the Melton South

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 $^{^{426}}$ VPRS 460/P/35850 (Torrens Application 35850). Conveyance 17/8/1863.

⁴²⁷ State Library of Victoria, Vale Collection, Vol.7, p.85 (nd)

⁴²⁸ Registrar Generals Office, Torrens Application 32416, Search Notes (Eg, Owen Cavenagh, Robert Nairne); also Torrens Application 2933, Search Notes (eg, James Brown Adamson).

⁴²⁹ RGO, TAs:- 2933, 32416.

⁴³⁰ Mr John Morton, personal conversation, 16/8/2006.

Chartwell – isolated, flat, dry, and totally devoid of trees – was a grand fraud. The Estate's street names – The Mall, Oxford Street, Downing Street, Mayfair Avenue, Eaton Court, Wandsworth Street, Stratford Street, Macmillan Parade, and Finchley Court – seem to be intended to inspire rich images of England. Most are famous English streets or places; others, including Macmillan Parade (probably named after Harold Macmillan, the English Prime Minister who assumed office in 1957), had more contemporary associations.

The original subdividers, an English couple, went bankrupt before selling the entire estate, which was then taken over by a real estate company. The estate was marketed to new English migrants in western suburbs migrant hostels, many of whom purchased their allotment 'site unseen' on the basis of the estate's proximity to Melbourne, and affordability.

The original approval of the estate in 1957 had apparently been an oversight on the part of a Council which at that time had little experience with legal processes for residential subdivision. The Council later attempted to redress the situation by not allowing building permits on the small allotments, and ultimately by declaring the subdivision as 'inappropriate'. The estate did not have water and, more significantly, sewerage; the high rock bedrock of the district would not accommodate 491 septic tanks. Compulsory acquisition was enforced, and residents were compelled to buy four adjacent allotments before a building permit was issued. ⁴³¹ Many purchasers, vulnerable on account of their local ignorance, lost out, as in the early years of Melton's European history.

9 INDIVIDUAL EVENTS AND PLACES ASSOCIATED WITH THE HISTORY OF THE SHIRE

Some sites around the Shire may be associated with individuals, events of local historic note, or tragedies or crimes that became part of local lore. Fabric is unlikely to remain for most of these sites.

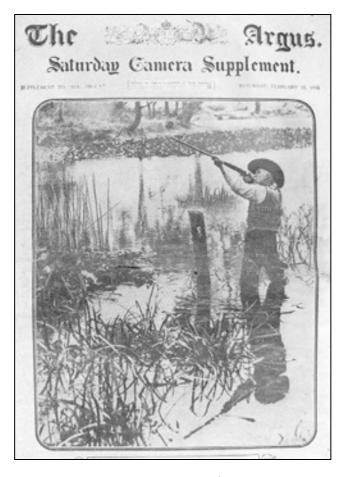
- Donald Mackintosh was an international trapshooting champion. His family lived on a farm on the east side of Toolern Creek; afterwards his father moved to Rockbank. All that remains of this site on the Mount Cottrell Road is some old pine and pepper trees. He is buried in the Melton Cemetery. The front page of an Argus Saturday Camera Supplement in February 1913 comprised a full page photograph of 'veteran sportsman' Donald Mackintosh at opening of duck season.
- The enigmatic bushranger Captain Moonlight stayed in the area. In one record he claimed to be *en route* to the *Rockbank* shearing shed to preach to the men; as 'Mr Scott' he was apparently also a Church of England lay preacher. He was eventually hanged. Another occasion he visited the Harkness farm with doubtful intentions, but left after finding them at prayer. The kitchen flagstones from the Harkness house, upon which he would have stood, are now the verandah of the Robinsons' former home on The Bullock Track.

⁴³¹ Personal conversations: Messre J Morton and G Hall, 16/8/2006

⁴³² Cameron, op cit, p.13

⁴³³ The Argus, 15/12/1913

⁴³⁴ Cameron, op cit, p.5



Donald MacIntosh (The Argus, 15th February 1930)

- Hector Fraser was another international trapshooting champion. His father took up a farm on the east side of Melton between Braybrook and Sydenham Roads when the *Rockbank* station was cut up into farms.⁴³⁵
- Criminals Saunders and Johnson rampaged through the area in August 1861 before being caught and hanged. On one occasion they held up the hotel at the junction of the 'Ballarat and Rockbank roads' (Melton Highway and Beattys Road), then accosted a Mt Cotterill farmer on the road from Melton, proceeding on to 'Mr Cropley's farm on the Footscray Road'. The assaults they committed there incited outrage among that generation. 436
- Christmas 1870 was tragic for the Kerr family, who had an 'extensive' dairy farm at Mt Cotterill. Having already lost their eldest son by drowning in a waterhole on the property, a daughter fell victim to diptheria. Within three days another three children had died of the disease. The Melton community then witnessed 'the distressing scene of the four funerals being held on the same day.' Another two of the children died soon after. Neighbours looked after the family dairy during the period. The ruins of the family's three-room stone and mud house, stone fences, and a stone lined cistern (or perhaps dairy basement) survive on the north-west corner of Troups and Boundary Road. The

⁴³⁵ Cameron, op cit, p.20

⁴³⁶ Cameron, *op cit*, p.15; also Batey, RHSV, *op cit*, pp.112-115; also Murray, *op cit*, p.98

⁴³⁷ Cameron, op cit, p.8

⁴³⁸ Bilszta, J 'James Kerr', unpublished typescript (MDHS, nd)

⁴³⁹ Bilszta (Kerr), op cit.

disease was rampant at the time and Ford's research indicates that diptheria and 'Colonial Fever' also took children of the nearby Woods and Moloney families. 440

- Another early family tragedy occurred when *Rockbank* station boundary rider John Commerford sat down with his family to a meal of mushrooms. The mushrooms were poisonous, and while Commerford eventually recovered, Mrs Commerford, their two children, and the shepherd who had shared their meal all died. This occurred in ...a stone house near the Kororoit Creek ... built by Mr William Montgomery JP'. Montgomery, 'grazier of Kororoit Creek', sold the property to WJT Clarke when he left the district. Elsewhere Cameron notes that Montgomery's 'bluestone' house was 'on the bend of the creek', and was still standing in the early twentieth century. It apparently does not remain, and its location is unknown.
- Hannah Watts is perhaps the most honored historical figure in the Shire. Joan Starr's history of the Shire said of her:- 'No pioneer woman is better known or remembered with pride around Melton than Hannah Jane (Grannie) Watts.' 444

Through her long and eventful life Watts served the community as a midwife and 'bush nurse'. 445 Later, in 1911 she established 'Lynch Cottage', the first hospital in Melton, and there helped into the world most of the babies who are now Melton's most senior citizens. The last entry in her hospital records the birth of Thomas Watts Minns, only two months before she died on 21st October 1921, at age 90. Granny's 'book' is famous locally as an impeccable genealogical reference. 446 Many of the Melton families that descend from Granny Watts also feature notably in Melton history. 447

The Gisborne Gazette report of Hannah Watt's funeral in 1921 conveys the regard in which she was held:

'On Friday 21^{st} October passed away one of Melton's most interesting and honored residents in the person of Mrs Hannah Watts, familiarly and affectionately called Grannie Watts.

The deceased lady who had reached the patriarchal age of 90 years has been identified with the district for 63 years during which time she nursed several generations of Melton citizens, while in the absence of medical aid residents looked to Grannie as their doctor, philosopher and friend. Hundreds in fact we might say thousands of people held the deceased in veneration. In the hour of trouble, sickness or death the striking personality of Grannie was always to be found bringing comfort and consolation to the afflicted. A woman of great energy and determination combined with superior intelligence, Grannie conquered difficulties that would have made many falter..., 448

An immense (for tiny Melton) cortege accompanied her remains to the Melton Cemetery.

⁴⁴⁰ Ford, op cit, pp. 240-1, 245, 249

⁴⁴¹ Cameron, op cit, p.8, and addendum p.3

⁴⁴² *ibid*, p.6

⁴⁴³ Leo Tarleton, pers.conv.

⁴⁴⁴ Starr, J, Melton: Plains of Promise (Melton Shire Council, c.1985), p.88

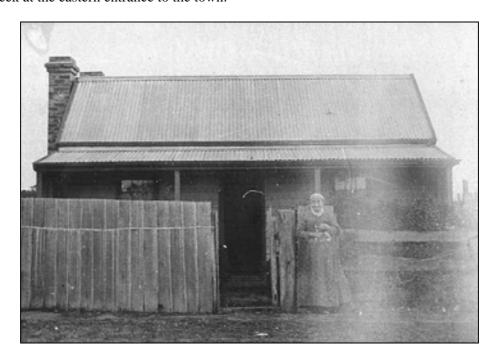
 $^{^{445}}$ ibid

⁴⁴⁶ *ibid*, p.98

ibid, pp. 89, 91-92, 93, 96.

⁴⁴⁸ The Gisborne Gazette, 28th October 1921. See also the Melton Express, 29th October 1921.

Until the development of Base Hospitals in regional towns, most small country towns had a private hospital established by a midwife. These were apparently the norm until after the Second World War. The midwifery profession, once widespread and crucial in rural society, is now effectively redundant, its former achievements largely forgotten and uncommemorated. Although her former homes, *Rosebank* and *Lynch's Cottage*, have been demolished, in Melton her memory is preserved by Hannah Watts Park on Toolern Creek at the eastern entrance to the town.



Hannah (Grannie) Watts outside her cottage hospital in Melton. The demolished building is now on the Melton Golf Course.

(Melton & District Historical Society)

CHAPTER SIX: TRANSPORT

Transport routes are among the earliest, most critical and most enduring expressions of European occupation. The fundamental importance of roads in the development of the region is underlined by the fact that (as everywhere) the original Shires of the present study area were called Roads Boards. Townships have sprung up and withered with changes in transport patterns or technology.

The first roads were cart tracks that meandered in search of good grades and firm, clear ground. The surveyors then drew lines, mostly straight, which often paid little regard to the landscape. But until bridges were built, woodlands cleared, and roads drained, or until land sales and new fences forced the issue, travellers still followed previous cart tracks. Some surviving remnants of coach and bullock tracks survive on farmland around the Shire.

Wayside hotels, such as the Diggers Rest hotel, and the ruins of the Rockbank hotel, are hallmarks of early transport patterns. Structures such as bridges, culverts, fords, pitchered roads, avenue plantings and railway earthworks, crossings and stations provide direct evidence of the transport routes themselves. In addition, indirect evidence of former roads might be found in early roadside fencelines, and even remnants of bullock wagon tracks. 449

Squatting Era Main Roads

The two earliest thoroughfares of Port Phillip passed to the south and north of Melton. The Geelong to Melbourne route was the first, followed by the 'Mt. Macedon Road' (Sunbury Road), which linked the rich pastures of the Lodden and Campaspe to Melbourne.

However, another of Port Phillip's primary early roads - the Melbourne to Portland Road - passed through the site of what would become the town of Melton. In 1848 residents of nearby parishes noted that the 'Portland Road', together with the old Sydney Road, and the Mount Macedon Road, were 'the three greatest thoroughfares of the Colony'. Chief surveyor Robert Hoddle agreed that the 'Keilor to Portland' road was 'of great importance.' 151

As early as 1839-40 Hoddle had instructed surveyors CJ Tyers and TS Townsend to establish the best line road between Melbourne and Portland. In 1847 he instructed surveyor WS Urquhart to mark the best line of road between Keilor Bridge and Bacchus Marsh, being part of the Portland Road. The reason for the link to Keilor is that this was the most downstream point on the Maribyrnong to have been bridged. The only other crossings were Solomons Ford at Avondale Heights, and a number of punts in the Footscray area.

Urquhart produced several maps, one from Keilor Bridge to the Kororoit Creek, and the other from Kororoit Creek to the Pentland Hills. They showed both the present track, and the 'line' that he then surveyed. There were two existing main routes to Melbourne eastwards of

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⁴⁴⁹ MDHS typescript: 'Some Facts About Melton' (1954): 'It was a common sight in the early days to see bullock wagons taking wool and wood to Melbourne, and today the tracks made by them are still visible on many properties'. (Mr Jeff Robinson advises that the introduction of new ploughs has since destroyed those that were on his property.)

⁴⁵⁰Minutes of Meeting, 6/8/1848, PRO, *VPRS* 2877

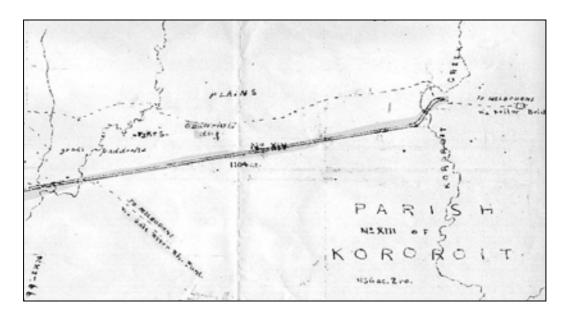
⁴⁵¹R Hoddle Report, 8/8/1848, PRO, VPRS 2872, Unit 2. (Few people travelled to Sydney by road in those days, sea passage being more convenient.)

⁴⁵² Scurfield, G & JM, *The Hoddle Years: Surveying in Victoria, 1836-1853* (Institution of Surveyors, Canberra, 1995), pp.74-75 ⁴⁵³ *ibid*, p.99

⁴⁵⁴ Central Plan Office Maps OR K7 and OR K8 (WS Urquhart, 1847): 'Plan of the Proposed Line of Road from Keilor Bridge to the Kororoit Creek shewing the Present Track and the Measured Lands on

Melton. The main track was 'via Keilor Bridge' in the north, while an alternative route deviated southwards 'via Salt Water River punt'. Whereas the original Keilor Bridge track deviated north around the Box Forests, a little north of the present Centenary Road, Urquhart surveyed a new road to the south along the line of the present Melton Highway. The original track crossed the Kororoit Creek a little to the north of the present crossing. Evidence of this track and ford survives. Urquhart used the existing line of track from the Kororoit Creek to Keilor. This showed existing tracks turning off to 'Mt Aitken' and 'To Green Hills and Bullangrook'. The Mt Aitken track was subsequently ordained as the main goldrush route to Mt Alexander, rather than the original Mt Macedon Road via Bulla. The *Green Hills* and Bullangarook route became another loop road to Mt Alexander.

Maps show the Keilor route as the main 'Portland Road' (and later 'Ballarat Road') in the 1840s and 1850s; 456 it was still shown as the main Ballarat Road on some maps in the 1890s. Melton township was surveyed at the junction of the slightly realigned road to Keilor with the road 'To Melbourne via Salt Water River Punt' (the present Western Highway). Upstream of the present Melton Highway bridge over Kororoit Creek a track cutting, a ford, and wheel tracks, dating from the time of the original Portland Road, remain visible.



The road between Kororoit and Toolern Creeks, 1847. The northern route to Melbourne is 'via Keilor Bridge', and the southern one is 'via Saltwater River Punt'. The dotted line parallel to and north of the newly surveyed straight road is the original track. There is evidence of this at the ford crossing on Kororoit Creek. There is also a notation 'Water Hole Dug'. (Lands Victoria, OR K7, 1847)

There were a number of alternative approaches over the plains to Melton from the more southerly crossings of the Maribyrnong River (prior to land subdivision and sale). The

both sides of the Line... being part of the line of road from Melbourne to Portland via Buninyong Burn Creek and the Grange.' (This is approximately the present road to Portland; Buninyong became Ballarat, and Grange Burn became Hamilton.)

⁴⁵⁵ Later plans also show the alternative Kororoit Creek crossing places of this road:- CPO, Map PR 47 (1855) 'Showing the land proposed to be taken for a Road through Mr Highett's property Section 16 Parish of Kororoit'. The present crossing was soon readopted:- CPO PR 104 (1859) 'Plan showing land proposed to be taken for a Deviation for the Melbourne and Ballarat Road through Mr Ingles' Land, Parish of Kororoit'

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⁴⁵⁶ Eg, CPO, Map NR 22 (1856)

⁴⁵⁷ Lay, op cit, p.90

crossing at Rockbank Inn, now on Beattys Road, apparently originated to provide access to the pastoral homestation of WC Yuille (rebuilt as the Rockbank Inn during the goldrush), James Pinkerton, Hyde and Scale, who were all situated close together along Kororoit Creek in this area. The original Kororoit Creek crossing on this route 'To Melbourne' (as it appeared in plans as early as 1839) was situated south of the Rockbank Inn and upstream of Deanside Drive, from where it veered north-east to Taylors Road. The present line of Taylors Road was the main track to Melbourne, leading over the top of Jones Creek and then southwards approximately along the line of the present St Albans Road to Maribyrnong River crossings at Solomons Ford at Avondale Heights (the original crossing), Lynch's Bridge (the current Western Highway crossing at Flemington Racecourse), and several punts near Footscray. The track also continued southwards on to Williamstown, so this was probably one of the original routes along which squatters drove the first flocks onto the western plains. 458 It highlights the significance, particularly of Taylors Road, and to a lesser extent also Beatty's Road west of Kororoit Creek, during the squatting as well as the goldrush eras.

The present Western Highway line was surveyed early, but was very swampy and impassable except at the height of summer. 459 Although new bridges were constructed over the lower Maribyrnong River in the 1860s, construction of the new Ballarat Road (Western Highway) took considerably longer. By the 1870s, as settlement proceeded, and as roads and crossings nearer the Maribyrnong River developed, it emerged as a popular route. The Clarkes helped. The 30,000 acre Rockbank property (for which WJT Clarke MLC had a particular fondness) meant that 'it was very desirable that the main road be extended into that area.' In 1865 he successfully championed the Braybrook Road Board (of which his son William was Chairman) proposal for a shorter and more direct route to Ballarat along the line of the present Western Highway. It passed through his Rockbank estate. 460

Goldrush Roads

The two great goldrushes of the nineteenth century, to California and Victoria, realised more gold than had previously been discovered in world history.

Routes (to Ballarat)

The first main road to the Ballarat diggings was the existing Portland Road. However before improvements took place, the route via Geelong was used by mail, supplies and gold escorts passed between Melbourne and Ballarat through Geelong. According to William Kelly: 'it was the only line for traffic, for the Bacchus Marsh approach was not ventured on even by horsemen, except in the summer season.'461 However the Keilor - Melton - Bacchus Marsh route was well establish by 1854.462

John Chandler's party set off soon after the discovery of gold was announced and crossed the 'very rickety bridge' (with toll) at Keilor: 'We were evidently among some of the first parties, for there was not much track to be seen...' They became lost on the Keilor Plains, arriving at 'Staughton's', and he showed them the way. At the steep Djerriwarrh Creek they:

⁴⁵⁸ Arrowsmith, op cit

⁴⁵⁹ Lay, Maxwell, Melbourne Miles: The Story of Melbourne's Roads (Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2003), p.86

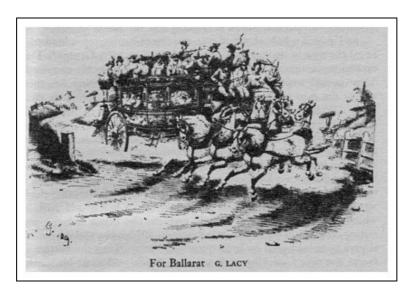
⁴⁶⁰ Clarke (1995), op cit, pp.31, 37, 45

⁴⁶¹ Lack, Ford, op cit, p.23

⁴⁶² *ibid*, p.27

"...tied a rope to the back of the dray, and all hands hung on with all their might to keep the dray from overpowering the horse. We saw several carts that had come to grief, quite smashed up at the bottom of the hill.'463

The Keilor bridge over the Maribyrnong River was washed away in May 1852, and, with difficulties in obtaining labour and material during the height of the goldrush, and another a flood mid-construction, a replacement was not completed until 1854. 464 Chandler proved, the river was still fordable there during a wet season, this was a very risky manoevre. 465 Presumably many travellers, and certainly bullock drivers who wished to avoid the steep banks of the Kororoit Creek crossing on the present Melton Highway, would have taken the alternative Rockbank Inn route to Ballarat, which was accessed by Solomons Ford and the lower Maribyrnong River punt crossings. (There were also two extensive water reservations for stock/teams, and also the Rockbank Inn for the bullockies; troops en route to the Eureka Stockade also stopped at the Rockbank Inn. 466) However, swamps in the Rockbank area were an obstacle to the use and development of this road during the goldrush period.



'For Ballarat' (G Lacy). This may be the Concord Coach.

The existence of the 'Keilor Road' (Sydenham) railway station meant that the Melton to Sydenham route remained the main coach road to Ballarat until 1884 when the Melbourne-Ballarat railway reached Melton and cut the coach-lines out of this route. The route had been well patronised, and in 1873 Cobb & Co. line put on a new coach to carry 25 passengers, to go with its massive 'Leviathan' coach of 1860, which took 100 passengers.

Those on horseback or in private vehicles would have taken the more direct route along the 'Footscray' road. 468 This present Western Highway route had been laid out through the swamps east of Melton by the 1850s, and was slowly being improved, thanks largely to the

⁴⁶³ Chandler, op cit, pp.37-39

⁴⁶⁴ Broughton, J.A.S., Walters, N.F. 'A General Survey of the Early Settlement and Architecture along the Maribyrnong between Bulla and Keilor', (Architecture Thesis, Melbourne University, 1963); Batey, op cit, pp.44-45 (These records are not conclusive.) 465 Chandler, op cit, p.67

⁴⁶⁶ Starr, op cit, p.16

⁴⁶⁷ Macdonald, *op cit*, p.6; Pollitt, *op cit*, pp.56-58

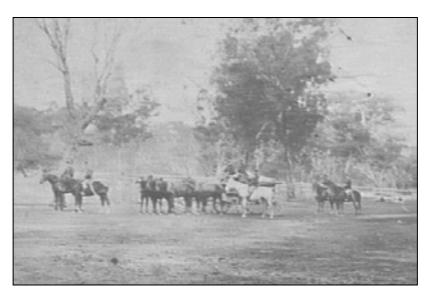
⁴⁶⁸ Chandler, op cit, p.178. On his way from Melbourne to Melton, in the early 1860s, Chandler notes: 'I could not go home by the Saltwater River as the punt was washed away, so went back by Keilor.'

Clarkes. Sometime, by about 1870, it superseded both the Keilor Bridge and the Rockbank Inn routes as the main non-coach road to Ballarat.



Crossing the Creek at Bacchus Marsh (from 'The Gold Diggers Portfolio')

Yet another Ballarat / Blackwood goldfields road was developed through Melton Shire. An undated map of the 'old and new' routes shows the proposed route leaving the Western Highway at Rockbank, taking the present Greigs Road to the Exford crossing of the Werribee River. The line continued along Nerowie Road, and south of the Werribee River, joining the existing road at Ballan. This may have been where Simon Staughton had built a bridge which he then charged diggers to use. The bridge is said to have been 'used heavily' by Ballarat diggers, and Staughton willed its proceeds to his eldest daughter Mary. It was washed away in the 1880s floods, after which the government built a toll-free bridge. (In contrast, maps from 1916 to modern times have marked 'Staughton's bridge' across the river at Doherty's Road, near *Eynesbury*. (471)



'Ballarat Gold Escort.'

⁴⁶⁹ CPO, Map NR 714 (nd). 'Plan of the Road from Melbourne to Ballarat shewing the Old and New Lines between the Salt Water River and Ballan.'

⁴⁷⁰ 'The Staughtons of Eynesbury' (Simon Staughton VI: The Great Entrepreneur, p.4).

⁴⁷¹ 1:25000 Topographical Map 'Eynesbury'; 1:63,360 Army Ordnance Map (1916, 1933)

Construction of major goldrush roads lagged seriously behind the demand, and 'permanent' masonry road bridges began to be constructed only by the end of the rushes in the very late 1850s. Melton is rare in having two of these scarce goldrush era bridges. The most famous is that over Djerriwarrh Creek, built 1858-59, which is one of Victoria's oldest and most intact road bridges, its beautiful round or Roman arch particularly high and prominent. The bridge is now bypassed. The original bluestone arch span of the Kororoit Creek bridge on the present Melton Highway was probably built 1859-60, making it also one of the very oldest surviving road bridges in Victoria, and a rare early round arch road bridge. Its second span dates from the 1870 'superflood', which devastated bridges throughout Victoria, and prompted a significant review of bridge design in the colony. The surviving bluestone abutments and paved base of this span are unusual. This bridge's integrity is diminished (but not destroyed) by its superstructure (deck) having been rebuilt and widened in concrete in the late twentieth century.

Routes (to Mt Alexander)

The shortest journey to the Mt Alexander diggings was not the original Mt Macedon route through Bulla. Rather, it crossed the Maribyrnong at Keilor, thence over the Keilor Plains through what became the settlements of Diggers Rest and Aitken's Gap. (This road was also one of Aitken's original tracks to the Yarra settlement. 472)

By the time the great flood of May 1852 swept away the makeshift Keilor bridge, the need for Government roadworks was urgent. Before a commitment to substantial expenditure was made, the Government sought a report on which of the alternative routes, through Bulla, or the shorter route through Aitkens Station, should be improved. In 1852 Colonial Engineer Samuel Brees reported:

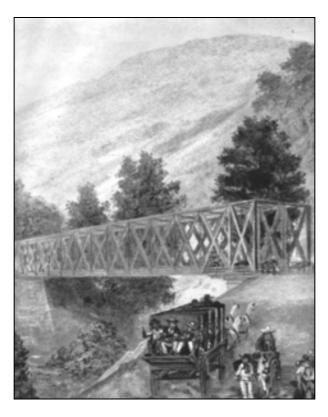
'There is not much choice between the routes by Keilor or Deep Creek [Bulla], the first is the most level and the other is undulating and better watered and timbered but it entails two heavy bridges, viz. one at Jackson Creek and another at Deep Creek in place of the one at Keilor, I therefore think that by Keilor preferable. Much of the ground being bad, it would require to be thoroughly drained by deep sided ditches and to be properly founded.' 473

This decision led to the creation of the Diggers Rest and Aitkens Gap townships. However the poor drainage and heavy soil made the route almost impassable after rain. Roadmetal surfaces, together with travellers, disappeared into the quagmire.

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⁴⁷² CPO, Map 'Sydney H\1, 6289', 1846.

⁴⁷³ Broughton, op cit.



'Keilor Bridge' (Samuel Brees). The bridge built at Keilor after the flood.

John Chandler's memoir reveals that there was yet another route to Mt Alexander, this time through Toolern Vale. Beginning his 1852 trip to this field he learnt that the Keilor bridge had been washed away:

'... we were advised to go by the Saltwater River punt, but there was such a bad road across the swamp [one of the Footscray crossings], and a fearful hill we should have to go over before we got to Gisborne (called 'Break-neck', because there had been so many bullocks killed there), we decided that would not do. Then we thought to go by Tulip Wright's, but when we got to Moonee Ponds, we found that some were going to Keilor, for we knew that Tulip's road was very bad, and we thought that if they could get over we could, so we followed them...[at] Keilor we found that the water had gone down, so we forded it.'474

'Breakneck' is situated on the Gisborne-Melton Road crossing of Stringybark Hill (or Mt Ida) between the Black Hills and Sugaloaf in the north of the Shire. ⁴⁷⁵ It provided a third main route to Gisborne, after the Diggers Rest and Bulla routes. It was probably favoured by diggers coming directly from ships at Williamstown (or the Footscray punts). They could have taken the old track up the east side of Kororoit Creek, crossing it at the Rockbank Inn. Alternatively they might have continued up to near present day Sydenham and met the road 'To Green Hills and Bullangrook' (for the most part preserved in todays Holden-Coimadai Road) which was the first track across the 'Break-neck'. This deviation from Sydenham might also have been used by those wishing to avoid the Aitkens Gap toll. ⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁴ *ibid*, p.67

^{475 1:25000} Topographical Map 'Toolern Vale'; 1:63,360 Army Ordnance Map (1933)

Arrowsmith, op cit. For Maribyrnong River crossings, see Canon, M, Old Melbourne Town Before the Gold Rush (Loch Haven, Main Ridge, 1991), pp.106-107

The Phenomenon of the Rush

The roads to the fields were a cavalcade of different classes and races pushing through abysmal roads in the hope of fortune. Not only the diggings themselves, but also the roads to the Ballarat and Bendigo diggings, were known internationally. Any surviving evidence of roadworks, or wayside sites, such as hotels, graves, or gold escort staging posts, will be of high historical importance, the more so because of their rarity today.

The extraordinary experience of the trip to the diggings, and their international fame, suggests the significance of any remaining scraps of heritage associated with this historical event.

In 1851 John Chandler set off across the Keilor Plains to Ballarat:

'There were all sorts on the road. Doctors, lawyers, tradesmen, farmers, sailors and policemen. Very few knew anything about digging. It was a sight never to be forgotten...'

'As we looked back the way we had come, there was one continued procession of vehicles of every description, for miles in single file, from a wheel-barrow to a tenbullock team.'



William Strutt's 'Liardet's Four in Hand Coach, the Eclipse, making a trip to Ballarat' (1851)

One young observer portrayed the scene on the Mt Alexander road in 1852:

'Hundreds of drays and carts were tearing and toiling through the deeply rutted track; horses and bullocks smoking and sweltering beneath a broiling sun; drivers shouting and cracking their whips to the loudness of pistol reports.......All except the women were armed with weapons of some kind or other, from the Irish shililah up to the six barrelled revolving pistol. Verily, I believe, there never was seen, in any part of the world before, such a heterogenous stream of human prodigality, pouring itself along a single line of road, with such golden prospects in view. Every face was radiant with hope and every one was sure of his fortune.'

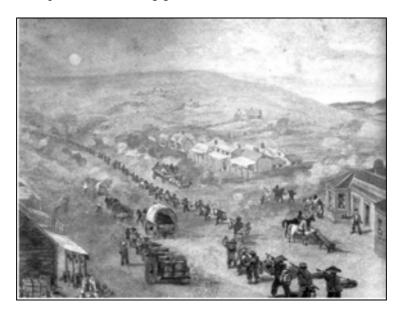
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⁴⁷⁷ Chandler, *op cit*, pp.37-38, 40

⁴⁷⁸Sherer, J, *The Gold-Finder of Australia* (Clarke, Beeton, London, 1853; Penguin, Facsimile edition 1973), pp21-2.

Local Isaac Batey remembered jogtrotting Chinese, Italians, and gloriously attired troopers on roads where previously sheep had reigned. Bullockies hitched their teams together, urging twenty-eight beasts up the glutinous clay of Bulla hill with 'downright blasphemy'. The yelling and whipcracking were not to be forgotten. By contrast, the American and Canadian coach drivers adopted a taciturn air that seemed well practiced. But to see these men drive their Cobb & Co. teams down the long straight grade of Gap Hill at a pace little short of a gallop was 'without question something grand'. 480



Chinese Diggers en route to Mount Alexander (Samuel Brees)

In a paper on the Mount Alexander Road read before the Victorian Institute of Science in 1853 it was claimed that 'the traffic on the road exceeded that of any road in England'. But it was the nature of that abysmal passage across the Keilor plains, preserved in the impressions of artists, diarists and travel writers, that was at least as famous as the volume of its traffic. Mrs Clacy describes the bleak winter winds and clayey bogs of the Keilor plains in the early years of the goldrush:

'It was almost disheartening to look upon that vast expanse of flat and dreary land except where the eye lingered on the purple sides of Mount Macedon, which rose far distant in front of us.......For ten miles we travelled on dismally enough, for it rained a great deal......The Keilor plains seemed almost impassable, and what with pieces of rock here, and waterholes there, crossing them was more dangerous than agreeable. Now one passed a broken-down dray; then one's ears were horrified at the oaths an unhappy wight was venting at a mud-hole into which he had stumbled.'482

In the same wet winter of 1852 Chandler set off across the Keilor plains for Castlemaine, as a carrier. Much later, he recounted:

⁴⁷⁹ Batey, *op.cit.*, pp.44-8.

⁴⁸⁰ *ibid.*, pp.48-51.

⁴⁸¹By Edward Richardson, to the Institute's 1854-55 Session; cited in Broughton, JAS, Walters, NF, 'A General Survey of the Early Settlement and Architecture along the Maribyrnong between Bulla and Keilor' (Architecture Thesis, Melbourne University, 1963).

⁴⁸²Clacy, op cit, pp 34-5

'To describe the state of the roads would be impossible. Horses were bogged everywhere, and often horses and bullocks left to perish. We have taken a whole day to get our drays half a mile. Sometimes they were capsized and we had to drag our goods along on top of the mud. When you got of the track down you would go with the dray, while the horses would also sink up to their bellies, and then we had to dig both horses and drays out. Very often we got stuck ourselves, and then we had to help each other, and frequently we lost our boots and had to dig them out. We had to cut down scrub and boughs of trees for our horses to get a footing...

We had as many as ten or twelve horses on one dray. I have seen three horses hooked on to one poor beast and then drag him out by the neck. The sufferings of both man and beast were fearful...'483



'Travelling to the Rushes', Mt Alexander Road in 1852 (London Illustrated News)

He travelled across the plains, past the Bald Hill, to 'Clarke's Special Survey' (at the Gap hill), which was the worst conditions of all:

'We were bogged nearly all day; when we got one dray out, the other went down. Here we had to stop with our drays up to the axles in water, and camp on a kind of island and walk to our drays up to our knees in water and mud on a cold wet night. We had no cover for we were obliged to keep our tarpaulins over our loads, and to all our miseries it came on to rain harder after dark and our poor horses stood shivering with cold.'

Summer provided little relief:

'The sun was very hot and the road very dusty, and we had no shelter from the heat, and we suffered severely from thirst...The sufferings of poor animals crossing Keilor Plains with heavy loads in those days was very great.'

The undeveloped portions of this exposed landscape can still evoke a journey that was so significant and colourful a part of Victoria's history.

⁴⁸⁴Chandler, *op cit*, pp. 68-69

⁴⁸⁵ *ibid*, p.78

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⁴⁸³ *ibid*, pp.66-67

It was in response to these conditions, especially the dangers to women and children, that motivated Caroline Chisholm to make her Victorian work the establishment of a chain of shake-downs, or wooden shelters along the Mt Alexander Road. One was in Keilor township, another on the Keilor plains, and a third one at Aitkens Gap. The latter two at least have been obliterated by roadworks, with no archaeological evidence remaining.

The diggers had a prodigious thirst. Batey records the crowds three or four deep at the Diggers Rest hotel, and the scene was similar a little further along the road, at the National Hotel past Aitkens Gap. Nine barmen attempted to serve the hordes of customers, and its two bars were so crowded that a 'change pail' would be placed in the centre of the floor to collect patrons' money. 486



Diggers Rest Hotel, 2003. The original 1850s structure was remodeled in the early twentieth century revival of road transport. (David Moloney)

Another traveller's story shows why roadside hotels were established at short stages between the townships on goldrush roads:

'At the other side of the Gap was a dreadful hill going up which the dray got stuck and had to be pulled up by bullocks, for it is the custom for men to stand with the bullocks to help drays out of the mud on the payment of a small sum. We went on walking for about a mile when the dray got stuck again; there were no bullocks to help them, the horses were very tired and it was nearly dark so they proposed that we should set off for the National Hotel to sleep and leave the driver to camp out...' 487

The National Hotel also had a sophisticated blacksmith, a much needed service when the roads severely tested the axles and poles of drays.

⁴⁸⁶Luebbers, 'An Archaeological Investigation of the National Hotel: a Mid Nineteenth Century Roadhouse on the Calder Highway between Millett Road and South Gisborne Victoria' (Report prepared for VicRoads, Melbourne, Nov.1994), p 57.

⁴⁸⁷Thorn, F 'An Account of a Journey from Melbourne in July 1855 written to her Grandmother by

⁴⁸⁷Thorn, F 'An Account of a Journey from Melbourne in July 1855 written to her Grandmother by Lucy Hannah Birchall (with accompanying letter)' (Manuscript, published in La Trobe Library Journal).

Roadside hotels were a hallmark of the goldrush roads. Their profitability is evident in the price their owners were willing to pay for sites. Big Clarke had bought-up much of the land along the Mt Alexander Road, and was able to extract enormous sums for sites from prospective hotel keepers. Having purchased his land from the government at £1 an acre in 1851, Clarke sold the one acre site of the National Hotel on the Mt Alexander Road (opposite Couangalt Road) for £1000 in 1855. In 1858 a travel writer was informed that another one acre hotel site 'on the verge of the plain' (possibly the demolished Bald Hill or Monmouthshire hotels) had been sold by Clarke for £2000. Later Clarke was able to provide further protection for his valuable highway land by including a condition of sale ensuring that railway land purchased from him would not be on-sold or leased for use as a 'drinkable' for the service of diggers on the Mt. Alexander Road.



Old Monmouthshire Hotel, Diggers Rest, 1961. Demolished. (John T Collins, State Library of Victoria)

Establishment of a hotel was invariably the genesis of a township such as Melton, Aitken's Gap and Diggers Rest. This might typically be followed by a blacksmith to service damaged vehicles, another hotel, and sometimes a police station.

Potential Goldrush Heritage Places

The evocatively named Diggers Rest hotel is one of very few Mt Alexander Road wayside goldrush hotels surviving. First established in 1852, the present double storey building was erected in 1854; it was renovated extensively in the 1920s and 30s as Mount Alexander Road began to revive as motor vehicles became more common. The Sanger Grave, which has been replicated (with the cremated remains of its inhabitant) at Diggers Rest, is also a rare monument to the many people who died, through sickness, foul play or accident, on the roads to and from the diggings. A presumed coffee shop situated west of the Diggers Rest hotel, said to be where Sanger was killed by a dray, was demolished in 1959.

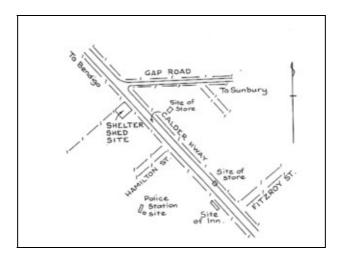
⁴⁸⁹Kelly, Life in Victoria, *op cit*, p 169 (1858)

⁴⁸⁸Luebbers, *op cit*, p 5.

⁴⁹⁰ Mr Charles Watson, personal conversation, 9/12/2005

Goldrush shanties and hotels also established at regular intervals along the routes between the towns; while most are gone, any archaeological evidence that survives is likely to date to the early 1850s. Stream crossings were particularly popular locations, as evidenced by the (former) Melton hotels, the Rockbank Inn ruins, and the old hotel site that it thought to survive on the hill east of Djerriwarrh Creek. Other known inter-town hotels on the Calder Highway between Keilor and Aitken's Gap included the Junction Inn, the Robertson's Arms Inn (which may have become the Live and Let Live⁴⁹¹), the Galloway Arms,⁴⁹² the Gap Inn, two Manchester Inns, the Bald Hill, Monmouthshire and National hotels. All have been lost to modern roadworks. However, a line of bluestone paving, apparently related to the Gap Inn (which may have become the Fox and Hare, or Bald Hill, inn) survived until recent times.⁴⁹³ Also a domed underground water tank, a scatter of handmade bricks and a depression (perhaps a cellar site), of the Bald Hill (later Millett's) Hotel survive.

Many diggers carried firearms, and wooded areas, including those west of Melton, particularly beyond Djerriwarrh Creek, generally sheltered bushrangers ready to rob small parties returning from the goldfields. Police stations were established at Aitkens Gap and Melton. These were generally intended not only for patrolling of adjacent roads, but as staging posts for the gold escorts, providing stables, forage, and secure gold storage.



Former places (now potential archaeological sites) associated with gold-rush traffic in Aitkens Gap.

The Djerriwarrh Creek bridge is a major engineering work of 1858-9. Incidences of destroyed wagons and horse teams continued until the time it was built. ⁴⁹⁴ It is of aesthetic and technical as well as historical significance. The earlier ford, and cut and fill of an earlier road can be seen. Wagon ruts survive on the west side of the creek, together with foundations of a former building (perhaps a hotel) among a stand of mature Grey Box trees. ⁴⁹⁵ Its location on the road to Ballarat has left Melton Shire with the distinction of being home to a second rare 1850s road bridge. The bluestone arch span of the Melton Highway Bridge over Kororoit

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⁴⁹¹ CPO Map P/A H98(2), n.d.; Deidre Farfor, descendent of James Robertson, pers. conv.

⁴⁹² MDHS 'Notices - Missing Stock' from Government Gazettes, 1855 (p.3120), 1856 (p.618) ⁴⁹³Casella, EC, Halahoff, A, 'The Gap Township: An Archaeological Survey: A Report for VicRoads and Victoria Archaeological Survey', (August 1992), pp12, 19; also CPO Map P/A H98(2), nd; also Deidre Farfor, descendent of James Robertson, pers. conv.

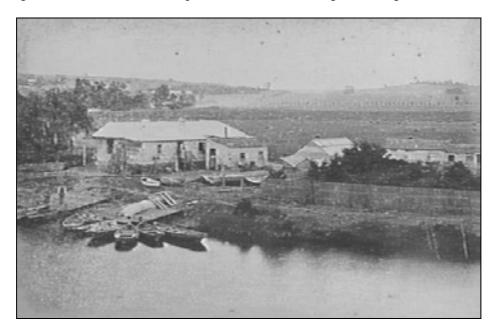
⁴⁹⁴ Cameron, *op cit*, pp. 14, 17

⁴⁹⁵ Victorian Heritage Inventory Site H 7822-0189. The site of the building may be the Djerriwarrh Creek school, that shows on the 1916 Army Ordnance Map.

Creek is likely to have been built c.1859-60 (a significant bluestone girder span was added c.1870, and new concrete decks were added in the 1950s and 60s).

Many early bridges were erected by adjacent hotel owners, including the first Melton bridge, which was erected by Mr Strahan of the Lord Raglan hotel. There have been a number of bridges over the creeks in the area. 496 Such bridges still mark the early crossing points, and were sometimes landmarks. 497 As most replacement bridges were not built on the same alignment, many of these early bridges survive in the Shire, although generally in poor condition. These include early timber bridges on Minns Road, Holden Road, and Beatty's Road. A number of substantial remnant bluestone abutments and associated embankments and cuttings survive, including on the Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road (over both branches of the Kororoit Creek, and the Toolern Creek); and the former 'Staughtons Bridge' remnants and its remarkable cuttings on the Werribee River on the southern boundary of the Shire.

The Djerriwarrh toll house, destroyed by fire in about 1870, is thought to have been on the eastern hill, and tracks cut into hillside are said to be visible. 498 No information is available regarding the site of the Aitken's Gap toll house, or the 'Staughton Bridge' tollhouse site.



'The old coach road to Ballarat, 'Maribyrnong. 5 Miles N.W. from Melbourne. (Perhaps at Lynch's or Raleigh's crossings) (State Library of Victoria)

The interesting bow-roofed coachhouse or stable shown in Pollitt's 1960s history of the Shire was said then to have serviced the early Ballarat route, which passed to the north-west of the town to avoid the Box Forest. 499 It is indeed near that alignment, but would appear rather to be a stable associated with the Melton Park horse stud, unrelated to transport.

It was the emergence of small settlements - Melton, Diggers Rest and Aitkens Gap - which were the major legacy of the gold rushes. Melton was situated on the junction of the two Melbourne routes to Ballarat, and also on one of the three routes to Bendigo.

⁴⁹⁶ Macdonald, op cit, pp. 3, 4

⁴⁹⁷ Cameron, op cit, p.11

⁴⁹⁸ Macdonald, *op cit*, pp.7,10; J Robinson, pers. conv.

⁴⁹⁹ Pollitt, op cit, p.24

Railways

Victoria's 'Main Line', the 'Melbourne to Mt Alexander and Murray River Railway' (to Echuca via Bendigo), skirts the north-eastern boundary of the Shire, crossing the Mt Alexander Road at Diggers Rest. This railway opened to Bendigo in 1862, but was operating to Diggers Rest by 1858. The direct Melbourne to Ballarat line, through Melton, was opened in 1889. Services between Melbourne and Melton began in 1884.

In 1855 the Legislative Council had directed surveyors to consider the most desirable routes to the Bendigo and Ballarat goldfields. It recommended the present Bendigo line; another route surveyed but not recommended was the direct Melbourne to Ballarat line through Melton South, which was in fact built some 30 years later. ⁵⁰¹

The Mount Alexander Railway

Victoria's first inland railways and the two great railway projects of the 1860's - the government-built lines from Melbourne to Bendigo/Echuca and from Geelong to Ballarat - were constructed to British standards never again repeated in Victoria. The Bendigo railway was the greatest public work in Australia up to that time and, with the Geelong to Ballarat line, remains unequalled in the monumentality of its engineering and the quality of its buildings. The Mt Alexander line employed thousands and cost a colossal £47,806 per mile. An inquiry was afterwards held into its extravagant cost, as a consequence of which it was not until the 1870s that any major new railways were built in Victoria, and then at a much lesser expense. Even with the huge Melton viaduct and the embankments up to Ballan, the direct Ballarat line was built for a fraction of this cost per mile.



⁵⁰⁰ Chandler, op cit, p.129

⁵⁰¹ CPO Map 'Rail 19' (1856) 'Plan shewing the Lies of Railway Selected by the Committee of the Legislative Council as being the most desirable to construct together with the various trial lines which have been surveyed.'

⁵⁰²McCann, J, Churchward, M, *Victorian Steampower, An Illustrated Social History*, (Victoria Press, Scienceworks, Melbourne, 1994), p 45.

⁵⁰³Harrigan, LJ, *Victorian Railways to 62* (Victorian Railways, Melbourne), p 24.

Diggers Rest Station. The bluestone platform dates to the gold era. (David Moloney)

The impact of the completion of the railway to Sunbury in 1859, Woodend in 1861 and Bendigo in 1862 was immediate and dramatic. Although roadworks had been undertaken and bridges built on the Mt Alexander Road, it could not now compete with the speed and comfort of the new railway. Formerly a roaring stopover for bullockies and travellers *en route* to the gold fields, Aitken's Gap township seems to have declined almost overnight. As occurred everywhere along the road, the police station, primarily a gold escort changing station, closed, and hotels went into decline. For example, a little further along the road, the National Hotel, whose site alone had cost £1000 in 1855, was sold for £600 in 1861, and only £475 in 1862.⁵⁰⁴

Until the construction of the Melbourne - Ballarat line, the 'Keilor Road station' (Sydenham) became the start and end points of the Ballarat coach services, and was used by locals in a hurry to get to town. Over time, the railway contributed to the emergence of very small townships there and at Diggers Rest. In the early twentieth century it was critical to the establishment of chaff mills in these places.

The anomalous and problematic wedged-shape intrusion of the Shire of Melton into the heart of Sunbury, between Gap and Vineyard roads, which persisted into the twentieth century, originated in the belief of Melton farmers that this would ensure access to Sunbury's rail facilities. They had apparently been caught up in the hype and predictions about the impact the railway would have in the regions it passed through, and were anxious not to miss the benefits of the great public work.

The Melbourne to Ballarat Railway

In 1880 railway survey parties were in the district again, proposing a railway about 3 kilometres south of Melton. Meetings and public deputations seeking to have the rail brought closer to the town were to no avail. Some had argued that it should be north of the town. ⁵⁰⁷

The final stage of the Ararat to Serviceton link in 1887 had completed the Adelaide-Melbourne-Sydney rail connection. However all this traffic went by way of Geelong until the direct route from Melbourne to Ballarat was completed in 1889. This Braybrook Junction (Sunshine) to Warrenheip (Ballarat) link, first proposed in 1855, had taken ten years to build.⁵⁰⁸

After wooden bridges were built over the Kororoit and Toolern Creeks, the railway reached Melton, and was officially opened on 2nd April 1884. Dignitaries attending the celebratory banquet at the Shire Hall included Premier Duncan Gillies, Minister for Railways Alfred Deakin, Chief Secretary and Solicitor General who represented West Bourke (now Bulla), Mr James Balfour, and MLC for Southern Province and Sir William Clarke MLC.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁴Luebbers, op cit, pp 5, 7.

⁵⁰⁵ Chandler, *op cit*, p.159; see also *Victorian Municipal Directory*, 1883, for routes.

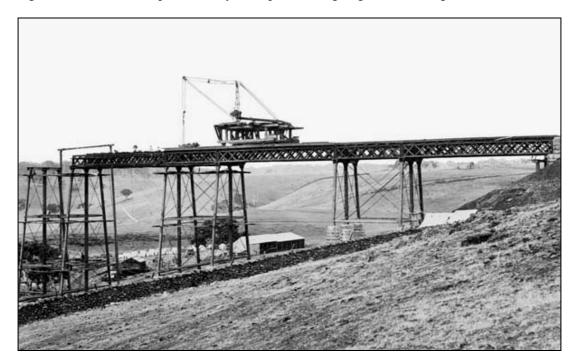
⁵⁰⁶Letter, Study area of Bulla to Assistant Commissioner of Roads, 19/8/1864, PRO, *VPRS* 967 (40). The Melton Shire extended approximately along Gap Rd to Horne St, and back along the railway line to the Calder Highway.

⁵⁰⁷ Macdonald, op cit, p.11

⁵⁰⁸ Harrigan, op cit, p.90

⁵⁰⁹ Cameron, op cit, p.23

Mr W Blackwood constructed the goods shed and platform at Melton station. There was one cutting required to bring the railway to the Werribee River over which the viaduct was built. The 375 metre long, 38 metre high viaduct over the Werribee River was the major construction on the line. Its lattice girder construction, generally of alternate 18.3 and 9.1 metre spans, supported on slender metal frames 'in those days was a remarkable construction'. Its light metal truss design, which contrasted to previous railway designs of masonry and metal girders, originated in USA, while the actual fabric was imported from England. It was an important early example of a large light metal bridge in Australia.



'Construction of Werribee River Viaduct, Melton 1885' (Museum Victoria). (Note the stone wall in the foreground, and the workers tents in the distant background.)

The railway had been optimistically awaited in Melton. The Victorian Municipal Directory kept predicting that the '...completion of the railway line to Ballarat making the direct line to Adelaide will cause a prosperous township to spring up at the railway station.' The impact of the railway was immediate, but mixed.

On the one hand, the railway facilitated some existing industries:

'The opening of the railway made the town busier, with quite a good trade being done in firewood. It was not long before two saw mills were in operation, and some milk traffic was developing.'513

For a few years, until the next stage was completed, the town also benefitted from being the terminus for the Ballarat coaches. However, after the line was completed, coaches, bullock wagons and horse-drawn vehicles continued in competition with the railway for a short time, but were soon relegated to local transport.⁵¹⁴ Local hotels that had serviced coach and other

⁵¹¹ Minns, *op cit*. See also National Trust of Australia (Victoria), File No.3741

⁵¹⁰ ibid

⁵¹² Victorian Municipal Directory, 1890, 1895.

⁵¹³ Macdonald, op cit, p.12

⁵¹⁴ Pollitt, *op cit*, pp.56-58

road traffic would have suffered. By the First World War both the Royal and the Raglan hotels, which had had extensive stabling buildings for the Melbourne - Ballarat stage coach teams, had been delicensed. 515

Melton, or rather Melton South, seems to have been touched by the 1880s land boom fever, with speculators paying very large prices for land near the station. ⁵¹⁶

In the era of the 'Octopus Acts', with the Gillies Government approving railway construction seemingly everywhere, the people of Toolern Vale were staking a claim. In about 1890 the Toolern Railway League opposed a proposed Bacchus Marsh to Coimadai line, nominating instead a route to Coimadai via Melton and Toolern Vale, connecting also with the Bendigo line at Holden. 517 All such optimistic schemes were extinguished in the 1890s depression.

Apart from the Exford (Melton) Viaduct and the Melton South and Diggers Rest railway stations (and ancillary platforms, sheds and signal boxes), there are few other railway heritage places remaining. Apart from the permanent ways, there are brick and steel bridges over the Toolern Creek at Melton South, and Keatings Swamp at Rockbank. No above-ground remnants of former sidings, such as 'Staughton's', the Melton South cattle siding, or the chaff mills, could be found. The only weighbridge that survives is that on Brooklyn Road Melton South. Semaphore signals still survive at Diggers Rest, and earlier style signal posts at Melton South.



'Q Class Steam Locomotive, Melton Viaduct c. 1886' (Public Records Office Victoria)

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^{515 &#}x27;Mr George Minns - Looking Back' (MDHS typescript).

Macdonald, op cit, p.14

⁵¹⁷ Macdonald, op cit, p.13

LOCAL ROADS

Some local roads, such as Exford Road, were based upon the tracks linking squatter neighbours, such as Staughton and the Pykes.⁵¹⁸ There may be evidence of some of these early tracks, in particular ford crossings, for example at two crossings of Toolern Creek about 500 metres north of the Exford bridge.⁵¹⁹

After the hectic road-making during the 1850s, which rectified some of the neglect by the Sydney administration prior to Separation and met the most urgent demands of the gold-rush, the new Victorian government disbanded the Central Roads Board and put road maintenance largely in the hands of district 'Roads Boards'. The Melton District Roads Board was formed in 1862; the (now demolished) Roads Board office was completed in March 1870. The Melton Roads Board was succeeded by the creation of the Shire of Melton in 1871.

The Melton District Roads Board and Shire did their best to keep the roads in good order. However, being dependent primarily on small local property rates, especially after tolls were abandoned in the 1870s, it is likely that here, as throughout the colony, roads deteriorated badly. Strong, stone pitchered road foundations and side drains were expensive. In 1873 it was already apparent that each of Melton's Riding's was 'badly in need of new roads and bridges'. As the rate revenue was too small to cope adequately with such demands, its distribution required all of then Shire President WJ Clarke's fairness and tact. Some colonial government funds were available for bridges on main roads, and these contributed to the two 1850s stone bridges on the main Ballarat Road, and perhaps also the remains of the composite stone-timber bridges that survive. No evidence of a toll-house site is known to survive.

Most Councils struggled to build and repair a few chains of road here and there with metal (crushed rock) on graded earth; few appear to have had stone foundations or constructed drains. Melton Shire however has a surprising number of surviving 'knapped' or cobbled stone roads. Or (more accurately) sections of the original hand cut and packed stone bases are exposed in about a dozen minor roads around the Shire, their original stone metal screenings and gravel surfaces having worn off. Many of these appear to have been built in the early decades of the twentieth century. Mary Tolhurst remembers that her grandfather Hogg worked for the Council building these roads at this time. Many of these roads would have been required by the new farms created by the break up of the large pastoral estates in these years, and may have been partly funded by the Closer Settlement Board or the CRB. Others, such as Taylors Road, might be of an earlier date, perhaps built to service Clarke's Rockbank station.

In 1914 Victoria's Country Roads Board had been formed to improve the roads that had been so badly neglected in the 'railway era'. However, it was still the era of 'horse and steam' power, wherein road planners' goal was to build short and tolerably passable dray roads to the nearest railway station. The railway then transported the goods the major distance. This philosophy still held sway even in 1927, when Melton Shire wards were resubdivided on the basis that 'each of the three Ridings has a railway station, and as all roads lead hence, it matters not where the revenue of each particular Riding is spent within its boundary; every

⁵¹⁸ CPO Map 'Feature Plans 342' (nd. c mid 1850s): 'Road between the stations of Messrs. Pyke and Staughton'

⁵¹⁹ CPO Map 'Feature Plan' 435 (nd); also discussion with property owner Mr Bill Green, 26/2/2002.

⁵²⁰ Pollitt, op cit, p.29

⁵²¹ Clarke (1995), op cit, p.67

⁵²² See also Coane, JM, HE, & JM, Australasian Roads: A Treatise On Location, Design, Construction And Maintenance Of Roads, Pavements Etc., Second Edition, (George Robertson, Melbourne, 1915), pp.193-4

ratepayer must benefit.' This event was deemed to be 'without a doubt, the most important event in Municipal matters that has ever taken place there.' The concrete girder bridge built by (later Sir) John Monash on Bridge Road in Melton South in 1913 is a quintessential expression of this strategy: it was built after Exford Closer Settlement Estate farmers situated east of Toolern Creek lobbied for more direct access to Melton South railway station.



Bridge Road Pavement: An example of composite Macadam-Telford road paving, probably dating to the Exford Closer Settlement estate in the early twentieth century. (David Moloney)

Although the CRB was busily bituminising main roads and making long neglected road improvements during the late twenties and early thirties, it was not until after the depression of the 1930s that road transport broke the dominance of the Victoria's railways. Thereafter motor vehicle transport provided a viable and more flexible option.

The continuing affordability of the motor car in the post war era precipitated a new era in Melton's history. One of the first signs of this was the land boom of the late 1950s, when many potential development properties on the outskirts of town changed hands at very inflated prices. ⁵²⁴ This was the first step towards Melton 'Satellite City'.

Since the 1960s the CRB has progressively upgraded the Hume and Calder highways. Dual carriageway and freeways symbolise the dominance of motor car transport in both private and freight travel. The emergence of fast roads and fast cars also made frequent services (such as hotels, stores, saddlers, blacksmiths, garages) unnecessary, affecting small rural centres such as Diggers Rest.

An historic feature that survives to a very large extent, although in varying condition, along the roads in the study area, are dry-stone walls. Road tree avenue plantings are also important, the more so when, as in the case of Aitken's Gap, they constitute the only substantial remnant of a former settlement.

There are numerous other mature ornamental avenues or roadside plantings within the Shire, principally of sugar gum, and probably planted in the 1930s. The Western Highway elm

524 Macdonald, op cit, p.17

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⁵²³ The *Express*, 11/6/1927

avenue, now a remnant on a bypassed stretch of road on the Melbourne side, was planted by Lord Huntingfield in 1936,⁵²⁵ and school children planted the pines on the Western Highway at Rockbank. In February 1959 it was reported that fencing for plantations had been completed on the Keilor and Melton-Gisborne Roads, and trees planting begun. 526 These may have been the native tree plantations that were re-planted on the Melton-Gisborne Road and the Keilor-Melton Road after the 1965 bush fire.

⁵²⁵ Eg, in 1936 Lord and Lady Huntingfield planted the first trees in the Western Highway plantation, at the 23 mile post (Minns, *op cit.*)
⁵²⁶ Melton *Express*, February 1959 (Council Report)

CHAPTER SEVEN: OTHER INDUSTRIES

Perhaps the most historically significant industry to establish in the area has been chaff cutting. But there have also been a number of small extractive, rural product processing and secondary industries operating in Melton at various times.

Timber Cutting & Forests

Whilst the plains area was originally very lightly timbered with she-oak, Melton was on the edge of a forest area. There were several areas of heavy box forest south and west of Melton, and the Djerriwarrh forest extended north along that creek and to the hills west of Toolern Vale.

The original track to Bacchus Marsh skirted to the north of this forest, but when the surveyors came through in the gold-era, it was cut straight through the forest west of Melton. For a few months the forest became a major employer. There were:-

'about 500 immigrants clearing trees and timber from off the Ballarat Road, some of the trees being large box ones. One large one near the reservoir is estimated to have cost £26 to remove...It took about three months to clear from Melton to the Djerriwarrh Creek, and many of the workers had their wives and families with them.' 527

The forest also kept Simon Staughton busy at *Exford*:

'Many hands were employed on the station, clearing the home paddock, there being some large box trees on the property and by means of a sawing plant cut all the hardwood timber necessary for his Melbourne properties and the home station.' 528

He put up heavy fencing – posts, some with orbs carved on top, and four rails – some of which are still standing. A ships bell was placed into a 'huge box tree' left standing in the back yard at *Exford*. While *Exford* was described as 'quite heavily timbered with big grey box trees', *Eynesbury* was termed a 'forest'. ⁵²⁹

The 1865 entry in the Victorian Gazetteer suggests that despite clearing the area was still quite heavily forested: 'on the north and north-west plains' were 'well-timbered ranges'; to the south were 'heavily-timbered ranges.' Anders Hjorth remembered that in about this year '...some lands west of Melton, known as the Long Forest' were opened for selection. 531

The forest created work for timber cutters, many of whom located above the flood-line of Djerriwarrh Creek, and probably supplemented the income of small farmers (eg, supplying fencing timber). Mark Paine would appear to have fitted one of these categories: 'Mark Paine had a small piece of land near Mt Cotterill, he had a couple of teams of bullocks, with which he often came to Melton for wood...' A brief overview of the area (in the mid twentieth century) commented that: 'It was a common sight in the early days to see bullock wagons taking wool and wood to Melbourne, and today the tracks made by them are still visible on

529 Staughton, JF & HPW, 'The Staughtons of Eynesbury', typescript held by MDHS, pp. 4, 6

⁵²⁷ Cameron, op cit, p.3

⁵²⁸ *ibid*, p.6

⁵³⁰ Pollitt, op cit, p.28

⁵³¹ Hjorth, op cit

⁵³² Hjorth, op cit.

many properties'. 533 Shingle cutters worked on the Toolern Road, and others on the Grey Box forest north of Minns Road. 534

The opening of the railway to Melton in 1884 provided a major boost to the timber industry. In 1887 the Victorian Municipal Directory's Melton entry makes the first reference to the industry: 'Large quantities of firewood are sent by train to Melbourne, which keeps two sawmills going'. The new easy and cheap transport may have made a low value product such as firewood a more profitable industry for small companies.

In the late 1880s (by 1889) the directory included 'timber and firewood' (and by 1893 'wood cutting') amongst the Shire's 'leading industries' for the first time. Apparently there was some good timber, as well as firewood, being cut.

In 1905 the directory was still noting that: 'Firewood is sent to Melbourne; two sawmills working', but by 1910 one of the sawmills had closed down: 'sawmill...Firewood sent to Melbourne regularly'. These sawmills, near Staughtons Siding, had been operating in 1888. The 'large quantities' of 1887 were now only regular shipments. By 1914 there were no sawmills listed in Melton, but the timber industry seems to have continued, although no doubt at a diminishing scale. The flat land near Brooklyn Road had previously been cleared of greybox timber for railway sleepers, but in the 1930s the Robinson family was clearing land north of this (Taylor's property south of the Western Highway) for cropping, selling timber for firewood and fence posts. Sisses

For decades the directories continued to note 'timber, firewood' as among the 'leading industries' of the Shire. The basis of this continuing inclusion may have been the consistent references, from 1889 until the 1980s, to Toolern Vale having a 'plentiful supply of good timber in the ranges'. Good timber probably meant that it was usable for fencing and building, as well as fuel.

Toolern Vale's 'plentiful timber supply' was always listed at the head of the township's features, ahead of its mechanics institute, churches, schools etc. The significance of good timber appears to have been important for those who were scratching together a living in those days. In the 1860s Anders Hjorth abandoned his Toolern creek site for 'the forest west of Toolern'. At this Djerriwarrh Creek block 'there was always an abundance of water and firewood.' One of Hjorth's known neighbours there in 1871 was Isaac Smith, described in the ratebooks as a 'splitter / labourer'. Hjorth's memoir refers to wood cutters and shingle splitters 'living in the forest'.

Much of the slow growing, high quality box forests of the plains areas were also cut to clear land for pasture and farming, and then simply sold for firewood. At the Staughtons' *Nerowie* for example, 'improvements' included the thinning out of the box forest by ringbarking, and then selling these to timber cutters for transport to Melbourne for firewood. In 1910 a visitor to Staugton's *Nerowie* observed that: 'Though many of the trees have been used for firewood, they are suited for a better purpose, as the Melton box is generally recognised to be the most

⁵³³ MDHS, 'Some Facts About Melton' (1954)

⁵³⁴ J Bilszta, pers. conv.

⁵³⁵ Victorian Municipal Directory, 1887

⁵³⁶ Ford, 'Rural Activity in Melbourne's WestI 1881-1911', op cit, p.6

⁵³⁷ Victorian Municipal Directories, 1887-1914

⁵³⁸ Robinson, pers.conv, 19/5/02.

⁵³⁹ In fact, until about 1971; this may have been a case of the directory being overdue for review.

⁵⁴⁰ Horth, *op cit*. (Hjorth may have needed extra firewood to cure his tobacco crop.)

durable grown in Victoria'.⁵⁴¹ (As with hay for chaff, Melton's dry climate and good volcanic soils combined to create exceptional 'produce'.)

No evidence of Melton's local sawmilling industry has been found. While the location of 'Staughton's siding', from which timber was railed to Melbourne, is known, there does not appear to be any above-ground evidence of its original function remaining. However remnants of the Melton forest area at *Eynesbury* are indicative of the former importance of timber in the historic economy as well as former landscape of the area.

Quarrying

Historically there has been little commercial quarrying in the area. Several small old quarries along the banks of the Toolern Creek between Melton and Melton South have long been filled. Some of the quarries established on the large pastoral properties to provide stone for second generation buildings (shearing sheds and dwellings) supplied material on a commercial basis. They would also have provided material for some of the dry stone dams on the Clarke estate.

It is said that the extensive limestone beds at Rockbank began to be worked after the railway passed through the district in 1883.⁵⁴³ A quarry is listed in Rockbank for the first time in 1927.⁵⁴⁴ The quarry, operated by W. Cockbill south of the railway line and east of Paynes Road, has been filled, and is now just a large depression in the ground level. Of interest however are the remains of a minimally reinforced poured concrete houses that were occupied by Cockbill's quarry employees.

In the mid-late twentieth century a number of huge industrial-scaled quarries were opened in the Shire, providing crushed rock to wider markets. In 1972 'quarrying' was listed for the first time among the 'leading industries' of the Shire. 545

There are likely to be a few small quarries and holes scattered around the Shire that were the source of materials for a nearby early stone building (eg at Toolern Vale primary school).

Gold

There have been occasional reports of specimens of gold being found in the Toolern Creek, but no mining occurred there. The possibility interested Mr Shebler (who had numerous commercial ventures), who had men prospecting in the 'Pyrete Creek'. 546

In the late 1880s the Victorian Municipal Directory entry for the Melton Shire's 'leading industries' included the statement: 'Gold has been found in the ranges from Breakneck towards Coimadai, and no doubt the country in and about this district may possibly develop payable gold reefs.' This was more a statement of optimism than fact, and was soon

546 Cameron, op cit, p.3

⁵⁴¹ 'Brooklyn and Nerowie Estates', in *The Pastoral Homes of Australia: Vol. Victoria* (The Pastoralist's Review, 1910), p.221

⁵⁴² Judith Bilszta, 'Pastoral and Agricultural Foundations in the Melton District: The First Forty Years', in Lack, Ford, *op cit*, p.184

⁵⁴³ Lack, Ford, op cit, p.62

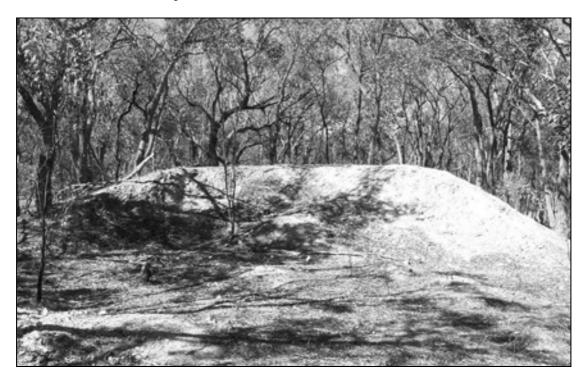
⁵⁴⁴ Victorian Municipal Directory, 1927.

⁵⁴⁵ op cit, 1972

⁵⁴⁷ Victorian Municipal Directory, 1889.

modified to 'Gold in ranges from Breakneck to Coimadai'. It was included as a leading industry until it was belatedly removed in c.1971.

Such areas were attractive to sole or small parties of prospectors during the 1890s depression. It may even have been prospected during the 1930s depression. There are a few hectares of former gold workings on the east bank of the Djerriwarrh (formerly Pyrite) Creek, north of Hjorths Road, in the Water Authority catchment area. This comprises the remains of many small prospecting holes, trenches, and some substantialal (though re-worked) mullock heaps associated with former deep shafts.



Gold Mining Works, Djerriwarrh Creek (David Moloney)

On the southern fringe of this auriferous area, Mr Harvey Patterson of *Melton Park*, and also a director of BHP in the 1880s, had the government diamond drill brought into the district to try for gold under the volcanic flow. Several bores put down on his *Melton Park* property were unsuccessful. However, water was struck, and Mr ST Staughton MLA suggested to the Shire Council that bores be put down in different parts of the Shire. Four bores subsequently put down around the townships were Patterson's inadvertent contribution to the discovery and use of underground water – a significant contribution to the Melton community.

Vinegrowing

As previously discussed wineries were a substantial nineteenth century industry in the Vineyard Road area, which was then part of the Shire of Melton. This is now part of the City of Hume. Some winegrowing was also undertaken north of Toolern Vale, in the Bensons Road area. (See Chapter Four, Farming.) Melton's vineyards declined, but continued untl the early years of the twentieth century.

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op cit, selected years.Cameron, op cit, p.24

In the late twentieth century revival of the wine industry vines have been re-established in this same area, and extended into the Tophet Hill area, within the present Shire of Melton.

Bacon Curing.

John Chandler's memoirs make several references to bacon curing being conducted in the Shire. At William Newnham's 'Mt Misery' (Mt Kororoit) farm, he and Chandler conducted bacon curing to supplement their income. Chandler carted this and other farm products for sale on the goldfields. When Chandler bought his own farm, Newnham 'took the bacon curing department' and Chandler the 'butter and dealing part'. A fire then caused Newnham significant loss to his bacon curing business. Chander also cured bacon on his own Melton farm. In the depths of the early 1860s drought and pleuro-pneumonia outbreak, it seems to been his salvation:- 'I raised a good many pigs this year [c.1863], and made them into bacon.'551 Chandler, with years of experience in carting to the gold-fields, clearly established this enterprise at a business level, and it has been attributed by local historians as 'the district's first industrial operation'. Other farmers may also have undertaken bacon curing on a larger scale.

An old bluestone building on Beattys Road east of Melton has been reported as 'Cockbills Bacon Curing Works', which operated until World War Two. Other sources indicate that this building, a survivor of the 1965 fires, was associated with Cockbill's pig stud / knackery / dairy herd. The aerial photograph of it burning in 1965 shows a high chimney stack in the centre of the complex, situated behind the bluestone building whose roof had also been destroyed. Two vertical metal boilers c.300 m. south west may have been used for boiling down carcasses.

Chaff Mills

Hay has been particularly important in the Shire's plains area. The early twentieth century saw the demand for chaff at its peak (see Chapter 4, Farming). In this period numerous chaff mills were built in an area from about Footscray to Werribee, Bacchus Marsh and Sunbury. Most of these (5 out of 8 on the western plains) were in Melton Shire, and 30 men worked at the two Melton South mills. Melton had the reputation of having the best hay in Australia. Melton was the location of some of the earliest rural chaff mills on Melbourne's western plains, and the last two chaff mills in Melbourne's western region to cease operation were also situated there. None of these survive.

The first steam-operated chaff mills in the district were probably associated with the mobile chaff-cutting teams operated by the Barrie family, and the Harkness family. (It is likely that some larger farms had their own small mechanical chaff-cutting machinery, but these would probably date to a later period.)

Many of the mills changed ownership a number of times, and some had interrupted operations. The first permanent chaff mill was erected by the Barrie brothers in Melton South in 1902. In 1908 they moved this mill to Rockbank, but built a new one at Melton a few

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⁵⁵⁰ Chandler, op cit, p.173.

⁵⁵¹ *ibid*, p.175.

⁵⁵² Judith Bilszta, 'Pastoral and Agricultural Foundations in the Melton District: The First Forty Years', in Lack, Ford, *op cit*, p.184

⁵⁵³ Johnston, C, 'Rural Heritage Study: Western Region of Melbourne' (Western Region Commission/Context P/L, 1994), p.163

⁵⁵⁴ Eg, The *Age*, 12/3/1965

⁵⁵⁵ Lack, Ford, op cit, p.90

years later. Around 1916 this was owned by Ward and McKenzie. Business was thriving, with overtime to fill shipping orders, when in 1920 it was destroyed by fire. It was rebuilt soon after. At one stage it was sending a truck of chaff a day to Deniliquin. Its reconstruction was not economical after it was burned down again in 1977. This mill (also known locally as 'Barrie's' mill) faced Station Road.



From Golden Jubilee 1923-1973, Melton South Primary School, 1973, p.28

The origin of Melton South's second chaff mill is obscure. It seems to have been operating around 1910, built either by the Dixon brothers, or Ebbott Kebby. Dixon Brothers were also prominent chaff millers, with mills in Geelong, Ballarat and elsewhere, and a produce store in Flinders Street. Similarly, Ebbott Kebby was a diverse Victorian agricultural business in the 1920s. In 1940 the Robinson brothers of Truganina bought the mill, and in 1950 it was taken over by BJ Trethowan and Jack Butler. It was later purchased by Wright Stephenson company (which apparently wanted to guarantee feed for their race horses), but the Trethowan family repurchased it in 1962. Situated on Brooklyn Road, it had a high brick chimney. They built a produce store in its place after it was destroyed by fire, but this is now demolished.

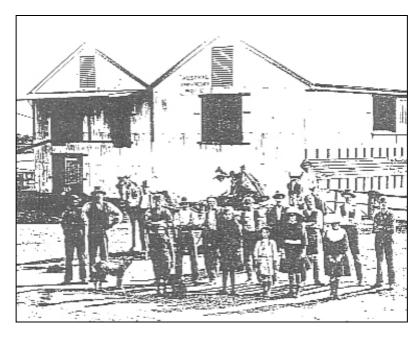
A 1953 Directory entry decribes the Melton South Trethowan and Ward mills as 'Chaff and Grain Mills.' 557

Austral Grain and Produce established a mill at Diggers Rest in 1912. In 1926 the mill was taken over by Schutt, Barrie and Robinson. This company also dealt in dairy, farm and garden produce. It burned down in 1939. The Robinsons then bought out Ebbott Kebby at Melton, and ran that mill.⁵⁵⁸ Schutt and Barrie had formed a partnership in 1916, with operations in Footscray initially; they diversified into flour milling. DS Robinson became a director later. The company closed in about 1968.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁶ Vines, Outline of Chaff Milling, *op cit*, pp.39-41

⁵⁵⁷ In MDHS collection.

⁵⁵⁸ Vines, *op cit*, pp.30-32. (This mill first appears in the *Victorian Municipal Directory* in 1915) 559 *ibid*. pp.28-30



Diggers Rest Chaff Mill about 1920 (Ron Cameron, reproduced in Vines 'Outline of Chaff-Milling', p.31)

The Barries moved their Melton mill to Rockbank in 1908 (and soon after built another at Melton). A G. Cockbill also established a mill at Rockbank in 1925; in 1936 this was taken over by John Hocking and Son. In about 1940 the siding was again disconnected. The directories shows two chaff mills operating at Rockbank in 1939. And in 1946 there is reference to the HSK Ward Pty Ltd mill at Rockbank. In 1972 there was no evidence of mill sidings found at Rockbank. ⁵⁶¹

Another mill had operated at Sydenham from 1919 to 1972. 562

Of the two last survivors, Ward's Mill suffered the fate of most of chaff mills; in 1977 it was burnt down in a spectacular fire. The last of the western region's chaff mills, the virtually intact Trethowans Mill soon suffered the same fate, also having been destroyed by fire. All of the mills had been built beside a railway line. Of the mills that once operated in the Shire - at Melton (South), Rockbank, and Diggers Rest – the only associated remaining structure is the Melton weighbridge.

Other Industries

Early records indicate that there was a brickyard located in the northeast corner of *Glen Elgin* adjacent to Gisborne-Toolern Road. The clay colour there was a reddish-brown. There is now no easily observable evidence of this site. The chimneys of the former Whittington home, on the north-west corner of the Melton to Gisborne and Diggers Rest to Coimadai Roads, are thought locally to have been constructed of *Glen Elgin* bricks. The Statistical Register of Victoria, 1871-80, also shows a brickyard in 'Melton' during the 1870s. The Statistical Register of Victoria, 1871-80, also shows a brickyard in 'Melton' during the 1870s.

⁵⁶⁰ *ibid*, pp.35, 37-38; Starr, *op cit*, pp. 215-221

⁵⁶¹ ibid, pp.36, 39; also Victorian Municipal Directories, 1935, 1939

⁵⁶² *ibid*, p.42

Notes of an unknown author on Tom Collins 1905 article in the *Express* (M&DHS)

⁵⁶⁴ Judith Bilszta, personal conversations with Mary Tolhurst, Ray Radford and others.

⁵⁶⁵ Ford, 'Rural Activity in Melbourne's West', op cit, p.7

There was also another brickmaking site beside the waterhole near Alf Chapman's house (Chapmans Road) where white clay was used to make white/yellow bricks. The chimneys of Granny Watts' Toolern Vale home were from Chapman's. These brickworks were probably small operations, burning bricks in an open stack rather than in a permanent kiln.

Melton township, situated on the road to Ballarat, had a significant complement of blacksmiths. Tom Collins recalled them as: 'Blackwood, later James Byrnes, next to Jongebloeds. Alec Cameron learnt his trade with Blackwoods had his shop about the rear of K Young's garage and later moved to the NW corner of High and Alexander Street.' Many early garages were originally blacksmiths, but no evidence of these now remain in the Shire. The only remnant of Melton's once-important blacksmith industry is the walnut tree planted by blacksmith Gordon Macdonald sometime between the 1930s and the early 1950s, situated in front of the High Street Civic Centre.

Given the area's dry climate and lack of streams, Melton was able to support at least three tank makers around the turn of the century:- Messrs Cecil, Shebler and Collins. The many cement rendered brick domes atop domestic cisterns bear witness to the importance of their work.

At Melton in 1892, 27 bee-keepers with 276 hives produced 9,665 pounds of honey. ⁵⁶⁹ In the early twentieth century one of these beekeepers Vernon Davies established his *Melliodora Park* (now *Norwood*) a bird sanctuary widely visited by schools in the western region.



The Naturalists Cabin on Vernon Davies former bee farm and bird sanctuary Melliodora Park (Norwood). (David Moloney)

In 1947 the Melton Shire had 63 men, 13% of its male workforce, involved in the manufacturing industry. 570 Many of these would have been in chaff mills, and at the Tame

⁵⁶⁹ Olwen Ford, 'Rural Activity in Melbourne's West: 1881-1911 (Appendix 2B)', p.7

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⁵⁶⁶ The house was demolished about 3 years ago. Mary Tolhurst has several of its chimney bricks in her possession.

⁵⁶⁷ MDHS article, dated 22/7/1969

⁵⁶⁸ Collins, on cit

wire factory in Diggers Rest. In the 1950s there was a small clothing factory in Melton employing about 12 women. ⁵⁷¹

In the early twentieth century, Edgar Greig of *Melton Park*, invented the 'Greig Gas Producer', which operated with charcoal and dripping water. The units were widely used in motor vehicles during WW11, when petrol was rationed.⁵⁷² It was not manufactured in Melton.

The sizeable 'Tame Wire Fence Company' appears to have been established in Diggers Rest in the early twentieth century. The factory no longer operates, but the building remains, complete with its name incorporated into metal work on the front gate.

As was usual in farming areas, there were attempts to improve agricultural implements. In 1907 Robert Ennis of *Gnotuk Park* successfully tested his invention the 'Ennis Patent Depth Regulator' for seed drills.⁵⁷³ There is no record of whether this was manufactured, in Melton or anywhere else. Cameron records that 'the late Michael Moylan's son would have made a first class mechanic, having made his own wool press which simplifies the work, a model of a reaping machine and the gates of the farm which are light and easy to handle, besides some improvements to the homestead.'⁵⁷⁴ His cousin, Michael Moylan (son of John Moylan) was also described in 1876 as being 'a very clever self-taught mechanic' who made many 'useful articles required about the farm'. 'The work that has been accomplished by him would, in many cases, not discredit a professional engineer, and in several instances he has displayed a good deal of ingenuity and perseverance.'⁵⁷⁵ Michael Moylan's son John was also noted as technically minded and inventive aviation enthusiast who convened aviation gatherings on the family's Mount Kororoit property.

In recent decades jigs and rigs were improvised to improve hay and chaff production on local farms. Bill Gillespie built a mechanical stook loader, Peter Robinson a hay-compactor, and Bernie Trethowan a mechanised stooker. ⁵⁷⁶ Presumably, these were not manufactured more widely, at least in Melton.

⁵⁷⁰ Lack, Ford, op cit, p.109

⁵⁷¹ MDHS, 'Some Facts About Melton, Victoria, Australia (1954)'

⁵⁷² Starr, op cit, p.244

⁵⁷³ Starr, *op cit*, pp.223-230

⁵⁷⁴ Cameron, op cit, p.4

⁵⁷⁵ The Australasian, 28/9/1876

⁵⁷⁶ Starr, op cit, pp.223, 227, 231

CHAPTER EIGHT: HORSES, HOUNDS, AND HARES

Horses have been a large part of the history of Melton Shire. For most of its history they were the primary means of transport, and source of power for farmers. They were the reason for the chaff industry that made the Melton district known around Australia. Breeding of draught and roadster horses was carried out on numerous nineteenth century properties, and Quarter Horse, Arabian, and racehorse studs are part of the rural life of the Shire today.

In colonial times horses also provided sport for all classes. The Shire played host both to Pyke's and Watson's foxhounds, the earliest and most prominent of the gentleman's hunting clubs. In the latter part of the nineteenth century the small local population was energetic in arranging race meetings at a number of courses in the district.

Small pastoralists/farmers Gidney, Moylan and Minns ran brood mares and stallions on their large holdings, 'thus rediscovering what William Pyke had found in 1843, that the land was ideally suited to horse breeding'. The Shire has since been the home of some significant bloodstock studs and training properties. Harness racing trainers are now especially prominent in the Shire.

The Shire also played a prominent role in another colonial gentleman's sport: coursing. Some of the first of Australia's leading greyhound racing events were held at Diggers Rest. In 1882 Australia's first Plumpton enclosure was built there.

The Hunt

Pyke's Hunt, the first known hunt club established by the Port Phillip gentry, may have been the origin of the name Melton. Local folklore was that:

"...it was through this event that Melton was named after the fashionable Melton Mobray [sic] hunting grounds in England. Melton was officially named by Rusden, although the first suggestion undoubtedly came from one of the huntsmen."

In 1936 Lord and Lady Huntingfield suggested that it more likely that the town was named after one of the other prominent hunting districts in England, also named Melton. ⁵⁷⁹

Thomas H Pyke, better known as 'Gentleman' Pyke for his bearing, manner and impeccable dress, was credited with introducing a pack of hunting hounds to Port Phillip in 1844. This '...afforded the sportsmen in and around Melbourne occasional runs in the country, about the Werribee and Keilor.' Thomas Pyke's station was on the upper Werribee, in the Bacchus Marsh - Ballan area, but the Pykes' Plains run of his brothers William, George and Oliver on the Toolern Creek at Melton (1838-1855) was also a major early gathering point for the 'Pykes Hounds'. Pollitt records that 'The trophies of the hunt were kept in a woolshed on the property and when the land was later leased by Bradshaw the skeletons and skins of kangaroos and dingos still ornamented the walls.' 581

Minns, *op cit*; Research by local historian Judith Bilszta points to it having been named after Melton Mains, in Norfolk.

⁵⁷⁷ Judith Bilszta, 'Pastoral and Agricultural Foundations in the Melton District: The First Forty Years', in Lack, Ford, *op cit*, p.185

⁵⁷⁸ Pollitt, op cit, p.23

⁵⁸⁰ Garryowen, op cit, p.734; also Cameron-Kennedy, DF, The Oaklands Hunt, 1888-1988: A Chronicle of Events (self-published, Melbourne, 1989), p.11

⁵⁸¹ Pollitt, op cit, p.23

Many 'could relate ... thrilling incidents of these good old times concerning runs with the dingo, emu and kangaroo...' Garryowen described the sport:

'The earliest squatters would now and then take the field after a kangaroo or emu, though the five-footer of bird was not easily overhauled, and found little difficulty in kicking over the best kangaroo dog that might come to too close quarters The dingo, or wild dog, was much more suitable as an object of hunting, for the animal might be said to partake as much of the nature of the fox as the dog...The dingo, therefore, was as a rule, hunted until other favourites of the English chase were introduced...'583

Pyke has been credited with introducing the fox into Victoria 'in the Werribee district in 1845.'584 Garryowen is more explicit in recounting that this pest was first introduced to Victoria at Pykes Plains, Melton:-

'By the middle of 1845, Pyke had some foxes, and on the 30th August one of them was started at Penny Royal Creek [Toolern Creek], some capital sport ensuing.'585

The fox headed for Williamstown and, not unusually it seems, outwitted and escaped the hunters. Mr (later Sir) William Stawell's mount was accidentally killed during the run. The typical dress of hunters of the day included a black silk top hat. 586

Aboriginal historian Presland provides another perspective on the practice of hunting:

'While the Europeans made sport of shooting kangaroos thereby destroying Koorie resources, Koories were shot or imprisoned for killing a sheep to provide themselves with something to eat.'587

However the hunts of the 1840s were not just sport for gentlemen. In the 1840's small squatters and graziers in the Sunbury - Bulla - Bolinda Vale district also subscribed to Pykes foxhounds, gathering with a vengeance to eradicate their biggest menace, the dingo. These too were social occasions, and the young Isaac Batey remembered the little-known treats such as goosepie and a bottle of rum that were produced when his parents hosted a hunt party at Redstone Hill. When some of the nearby bachelor squatters quartered the hounds, gatherings were more roistering affairs. Although known as 'Pykes Hounds' Batey thought that Thomas Pyke may never have attended a meet in the Sunbury locality: 'To my judgement they were merely itinerating our way, first under Tuckwell, then as a finale in charge of Perry.' It is also thought that 'Gentleman' Pyke never rode to his hounds at Melton hunts.

Melton also seems to have played a part in the history of the Melbourne Hunt Club. ⁵⁹⁰ The Pyke hunt was disbanded when Thomas Pyke returned to England in 1854. Around this time George Watson, who had hunted with the Pykes, formed the Melbourne Hunt Club. ⁵⁹¹ Watson came to be 'regarded by many as the father of fox hunting in Australia'; the

⁵⁸² Sutherland, 1888, op cit, p.423

⁵⁸³ Garryowen, op cit, p.734

⁵⁸⁴ Cameron-Kennedy, op cit, p.11

⁵⁸⁵ Garryowen, op cit, p.734

⁵⁸⁶ Pollitt, op cit, p.23

⁵⁸⁷ Presland (199), op cit, p.101

⁵⁸⁸ Batey, RHSV, op cit, p.101-2, 53.

⁵⁸⁹ Starr, *op cit*, p.32

⁵⁹⁰ Ronald, HB, *Hounds and Running: A History of the Melbourne Hunt* (Lowden, Kilmore, 1970)]

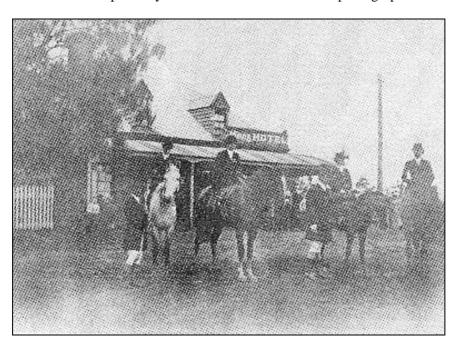
⁵⁹¹ Pollitt, op cit, p.23

Melbourne pack was one of the finest outside the British Isles.⁵⁹² Tom Collins recounted that in his time at Melton, 1890-1913:

'The Melbourne Hunt Club used to meet in Keilor Road just east of the Toolern Creek on the north side of what was originally known as Pykes Run. This was also the place were the Races were held and the Sports Meetings. Dave Murphy, employed at Clarke's Rockbank Station usually provided the fox which he liberated there for the Club.' 593

This site would have been Pykes station; the present Melton Golf Course site. In time Melbourne Hunt established its kennels at Deer Park,⁵⁹⁴ presumably in the vicinity of the Hunt Club Hotel on the Ballarat Road.

The Oaklands Hunt Club, established at Bulla in 1888, sometimes ventured onto the Keilor plains; local businessman EC Robertson (of a Melton produce and chaff store) was Master at Oaklands 1929-35. 595 It is probably this club that is shown in the photograph below. 596



A Hunting Party outside Minns Hotel (Melton & District Historical Society)

Melton's declining hunting associations revived a little in more recent times, courtesy of Mr Anthony Baillieu, the new owner at *Eynesbury*. The Staughtons don't appear to have been too interested in hunting. ⁵⁹⁷ In 1981 the Oaklands club had its first meet at *Eynesbury*. This 'new hunt country' was '...basically a 3,500 hectare paddock, mainly flat, all open grazing with sections of surface rock here and there and the odd plantation for wind breaks, which provides the follower with the occasional obstacle.' It provided an exhilarating run. In 1988 the Club was still meeting 'at the plantation on the roadside.' A number of jump-fences

⁵⁹² Cameron-Kennedy, op cit, p.12

⁵⁹³ Collins, op cit.

⁵⁹⁴ Cameron-Kennedy, op cit, p.12

⁵⁹⁵ Cameron-Kennedy, *op cit*, pp.29, 39, 101, 119.

⁵⁹⁶ Starr, op cit, p.200

⁵⁹⁷ The only record found is HW Staughton's 1873 invitation to 20-30 residents to a hunt to cull kangaroos at *Exford* (Macdonald *op cit*, p.10)

⁵⁹⁸ Cameron-Kennedy, op cit. pp.188-189

remain around the Shire, on Hoggs and Plumpton Roads in the north. There are likely to be others.

Racehorse Training and Studs

Prominent squatter WC Yuille was the area's first importer of stud racehorses. He left *Rockbank* and became an auctioneer in Bourke Street, selling bloodstock under the name of WC Yuille & Son. ⁵⁹⁹ TH Pyke's imported thoroughbred stallion 'Necromancer', the best blooded horse in the province and worth 700 guineas, made news when it died suddenly in 1846. ⁶⁰⁰

In 1902 Mr EE Clarke, brother of Sir Rupert Clarke, established the *Melton Stud*. In 1910 this became home to Clarke's most successful stud, the English horse 'The Welkin'. The Welkin raised Melton's profile in turf circles, winning three Sires Premierships (1919, 1921, and 1922), and being a place-getter on another four occasions. His most famous son was 'Gloaming' which won 57 of 67 starts and set a new record in stake winnings. The Welkin was buried near the entrance gates to Clarke's stud; where its inscribed marble headstone remains today. Clarke's obituary described him as 'one of the leading owners and breeders of the Australian Turf for the last 40 years.

Another impressive but less successful stud was Harvey Patterson's *Melton Park* Estate. Patterson had previously sold his NSW property for £500,000, and in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries invested in many new buildings on *Melton Park*, including a school for the families of his large workforce, an expensive track, and stables. Some horses, including 'Trackera' and 'Deleware', gave Patterson a small return for his great investment in the property. 603

In 1926 the Melton *Express* declared proudly that 'Melton is also noted for breeding good horses'. It reported the success of EED Clarke's 'famous Welkin', and also noted the 'owners of good trotters' in the district. ⁶⁰⁴

The fact that last two chaff mills operating in Melbourne's west were situated at Melton was in part a consequence of the growth of racing and trotting studs in the Melton area in the 1960s. Trotting tracks were cropping up everywhere. The rise of hobby farms also made a significant contribution to the horse population of the region. 605

By 1978 the Victorian Municipal Directory had included 'horse breeding' amongst the Shire's leading industries. The large model stud farm *Stockwell* at Diggers Rest, established by Mr Ken Cox in 1958, was indicative of the growth of the industry. Nine years later *Turf Monthly* carried an article on 'Breathtaking Stockwell', which described its no-expense-spared facilities, international design standards, leading role in scientific vetinary methods, and general orderliness. Hundreds of trees had been planted to provide shelter and ornament on the 725 acre property, and brick loose boxes, a laboratory, 'magnificent' covering barn, and silos were features of the place. The property, which appears to have previously been an unknown racehorse stud, had been selected with the help of EA Underwood of *Warlaby* Tullamarine, who also leased Cox his champion stud 'Laundau'. The criteria with which Cox chose to locate his new stud farm were were:- a rainfall of between 17 and 20 inches (to ensure strong-hooved horses); a place not too high above sea-level (less than 620 feet, 'to

⁵⁹⁹ Cameron, op cit, p.16

⁶⁰⁰ Garryowen, op cit, p.967

⁶⁰¹ Starr, *op cit*, pp, 200-204

⁶⁰² MDHS, undated press clipping; and miscellaneous papers.

⁶⁰³ Cameron, op cit, p.24

⁶⁰⁴ The *Express*, 6/3/1926

⁶⁰⁵ Vines, *op cit*, p.24; Mrs Mary Tolhurst, pers. conv.

⁶⁰⁶ Turf Monthly, November 1967, pp.18-20

facilitate growth and prevent a "mountain pony" type'); and where there were 'good winds to sweep away bacteria'. Many years later, after he had suffered a stroke and the property had been purchased by His Excellency Nasser Lootah (who gave the property is present name of *Emirates Park*), Cox was described as having been a 'giant among thoroughbred breeding enthusiasts'. *Stockwell* had become 'the flagship of the Victorian breeding industry'. In the mid 1960s, as its fame grew, a *Stockwell* open day had drawn a crowd of 25,000 people. Horses such as 'Landau', 'Arctic Explorer', 'Showdown' ('an immediate sensation', and the Australian Champion Broodmare Sire in 182-83), 'Empyrean', 'Tobin Bronze', 'Comeram', 'Tirol', 'Our Poetic Prince', and Golden Slipper winners 'Tontonan' and 'Toy Show', were some of the horses that had been associated with the stud. 608

Such developments led to a growing appreciation within the Shire of its equestrian industry, and history. In about 1990 the Shire released a new logo: 'Melton: the heart of Thoroughbred Country', and a map showing the extent of its thoroughbred studs, training premises, trotting tracks, equestrian centres, and agistment properties. In broad terms, the trotting tracks were situated on the plains areas around Rockbank and Melton, with studs generally situated in the more undulating areas to the north.



Shire of Melton, c.1992, 'The Heart of Thoroughbred Country'. Showing the location of horse studs and training facilities in the Shire.

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 ⁶⁰⁷ Turf Monthly, December 1970, pp.20-22
 ⁶⁰⁸ Turf Monthly, December 1997, pp.46-48

Racecourses

The small communities of the area organised a number of racing events in the nineteenth century. Originally these were on convenient paddocks, without improvements.

According to Cameron, Mr WD Keating of Rockbank was 'the first to get races going in the district'. These were 'held on the flat on the south side of the Kororoit creek opposite Montgomery's paddock.' Keating owned two or three horses himself. Most of those attending came from Melbourne, 'the races being well run and attracting large crowds'. 609

Michael Ryan, the popular licensee of Melton's Royal Hotel:

'...got up races called the Publican's races; the handicap was £15 with smaller amounts for other races. They attracted a large gathering with good racing and no disputes.'

Racehorses were entered from the Kyneton, Pentland Hills and Bacchus Marsh districts. Charles Charde of 'Toper' fame' came from Diggers Rest. Ryan, who had been a member of the Roads Board, died young, so it is likely that these races occurred in the late 1850s or 1860s.

Although there is no heritage fabric remaining, the site of these races is of historical significance, especially as they were also the scenes of later town sports meetings. In 1905 it was said that in the late 1850s races had been conducted in the area from about the present Shire Hall, to the Uniting Church and Golf Course. There are also references to 'Hoare's paddock' (Ryan's father in law) 'on Ryan's Road South, opposite McIntosh's', and 'Manning's Paddock' (later EW Barrie's) 'on Ferris Road'. Collins relates that 'Pykes Run', the site of the Melbourne Hunt Club meetings, 'was also the place were the Races were held and the Sports Meeting.' Cameron says Ryan purchased 'the sports paddock' after the death of Henry Pyke, and later sold it to WJ Clarke. Minns advises that 'Still later, athletic sports, cycling and pony races were held annually in Clarke's paddock (later Nixon's) on Keilor Road.' The present Golf Course was at or near the centre of these sites.

Later the Melton Racing Club was formed. Around 1870 it was reported that 'Races were held on Boxing Day and as the weather was good, were very successful...the Treasurer Mr Manning entertained the stewards and others with a very liberal lunch at the Royal hotel.' Events were the Maiden Plate, Farmers Purse, Hurdle, Melton Handicap and Hack Race. Another report informs of a £70 handicap, two hurdle races of £40 each, and smaller amounts for other races. Also smaller amounts for other races.

HW Staughton loaned land on Exford for a new MRC course. He 'also cleared the ground for them, and the ground was chained off by Mr Bond late secretary of the VATC to enable

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⁶⁰⁹ Cameron, op cit, p.18

⁶¹⁰ Cameron, op cit, p.12

⁶¹¹ Starr, op cit, p.211

⁶¹² ibid; also Minns, op cit.

⁶¹³ Collins, *op cit*. It would appear that this site pre-dated the site where, Collins informs: 'Early in 1900 the recreation park was created and the Caledonian and the ANA sports meetings were held there.'

⁶¹⁴ Cameron, op cit, p.12

 $^{^{615}}$ Minns, op cit

⁶¹⁶ Macdonald, op cit, p.8

⁶¹⁷ Cameron, op cit, p.8

the races to be run.' In 1882 'a new wooden stand with a galvanised roof' was built at the racecourse 'and several other improvements made.'618 Staughton built this 'small wooden grandstand'. The Club held four meetings annually: summer, autumn, winter, and spring. 619

Racing seems to have been a growing sport in the district. An article in March 1884 reported that:

'Small as Melton is to look at, it is a wonderfully energetic place in all its movements. A race programme has been issued which equals any put forth by country towns of far greater size.'620

This was the era in which organised sport took off, helped by developments such as the widespread adoption of Saturday afternoon holidays for workers. (Notably, in March 1884, Melton's blacksmiths advised the town that they would now be closing at 1pm on Saturdays. 621) The opening of the railway to Melton in 1884 would also have helped the events. By the end of the century multiple special trains were bringing large crowds to Melton for the meetings. The large losses incurred by the washed-out 1927 resulted in this being the Club's last meeting. 622

The exact location of this course on the Western Highway is uncertain. There is no knowledge of any remaining evidence of it. Probably in the early 1960s, Minns reported that it was originally 'on HW Staughton's paddock at the 26th milepost (now owned by H Hurley)'. 623 Mr J Robinson advises that 'The Racecourse Paddock' was south of High Street, to the east of Bulmans Road. 624

General Horse Breeding; Workhorses

In its early years the Melton Agricultural Society awarded its largest prizes in the category 'Horse Stock'. 625 In his memoirs Cameron remembered the fine exhibitions of draught horses from surrounding districts. 626 The 'surprising number of blood stock entries in all sections' at the 1876 Agricultural Society Show has attracted the notice of local historians. 627

Dependence on horses for transport and work supported three blacksmiths in the town in 1870s: A Blackwood, James McPherson, and A Cameron. The Barrie family bred draught horses for the local chaff mill industry. 628 Although situated on the south side of Brooklyn Road, the peppercorn trees on the corner of Station and Brooklyn Roads are thought to have been associated with the former horse trough, erected to serve workhorses carting farm produce to Melton South chaff mills and railway station. A rare testimony to the importance of horses in a farming community was a 1/8/1929 bronze plaque, which commemorated the

⁶¹⁸ Macdonald, op cit, p.11

⁶¹⁹ Minns, op cit; Macdonald, op cit, p.4

⁶²⁰ Macdonald, op cit, p.11

⁶²² J Bilszta, pers.conv; note that Starr, op cit (.p.211) says that the last race occurred before the turn of the century.

⁶²³ Minns, op cit

⁶²⁴ J Robinson, pers. conv. (Note that there are other as yet unconfirmed reports of the racecourse on Brooklyn Road, between Station and Coburn Streets.)

⁶²⁵ Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1862-63, Vol.3, 'Third Annual Report of the Board of Agriculture', p.15.

⁶²⁶ Cameron, op cit, p.1

⁶²⁷ Bilszta, J, 'Pastoral and Agricultural Foundations in the Melton District: The First Forty Years' (MDHS typescript) ⁶²⁸ Bilszta, pers. conv.

famous 'Welkin' on this site. There is now no evidence of a bore, stand-pipe, trough, or commemorative plaque remaining on the site.

In about 1874, George Minns began his own farm in Melton. By 1888, it was reported:

'He breeds horses, making a speciality of English roadsters, with which he has taken several first-class prizes; and he sold a young colt to go to Queensland for 250 guineas, and has obtained good prices for many others.'629

Another horse and cattle breeder who is known to have had 240 acres in Melton at this time was Angus Love of Keilor. 630

In the twentieth century John Minns of Rockbank bred Clydesdales and trotters, which he advertised in bloodstock magazines. 631

Greyhound Coursing

Together with fox hunting and shooting, coursing was one of the traditional recreations of a country gentleman. Again, Melton Shire was a key in the early development of coursing.

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

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

'plentiful, large framed and stout runners. The ground was dry and firm, good going for the 400 spectators, who were quiet and orderly. The courses were easier to predict because the hares tended to run north, striving to escape into the rough ground bordering Jacksons Creek.'632

Clarke later stated that the superior sport of the (four day) meeting 'was due to the five strong hares that had been released at Diggers Rest six years before.' Another advantage of Diggers Rest was the nearby railway station, which made public access to the paddocks easy: 'The special train was waiting nearby and reached Melbourne before six o'clock.'

The popular Diggers Rest soon became the premier venue of the Victorian Coursing Club (of which Clarke was President). On 1st August 1881 the Victoria Coursing Club (VCC) held the Waterloo Cup in the Plumpton enclosure at Diggers Rest for the first time.'634

In 1882 Diggers Rest became the site of Australia's first greyhound Plumpton:

'The Waterloo Cup meeting of 1st August 1882 introduced an entirely new element into field coursing. The VCC decided to construct a Plumpton enclosure. The word

⁶²⁹ Victoria and Its Metropolis, op cit, p.432

⁶³⁰ Victoria and Its Metropolis, op cit, p.429

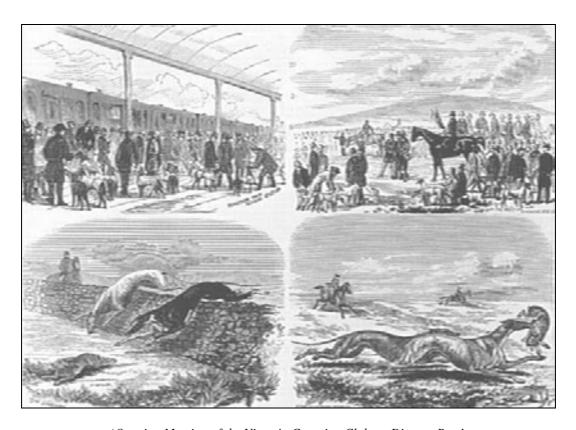
⁶³¹ Bilszta, pers. conv.

⁶³² Clarke (1995), op cit, pp. 74-75

⁶³³ *ibid*, pp.74-75

⁶³⁴ *ibid*, p.157

Plumpton came from a village in Sussex, and WJ Clarke sent details back to Australia after his visit there. The enclosed new oval was hurriedly constructed a mile west of Diggers Rest and was first used for the final two days of the Waterloo Cup. It drew a very large crowd to view the most successful meeting yet held. The innovation met with almost universal approval ... there was much less fatigue than that caused by tramping over hundreds of boulder-strewn acres to follow 20 courses in a day. In a confined space, Banner's expert slipping could be fully appreciated and the reasons leading to the judge's decisions were more apparent. The meeting ended with hearty cheers for the absent Hon. WJ Clarke...'635



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

The four images are entitled: 'Departure from Railway Station'; 'The Meet at Diggers Rest'; 'The Stonewall'; 'The Deciding Course'.

(The Australasian Sketcher, 14th May 1875)

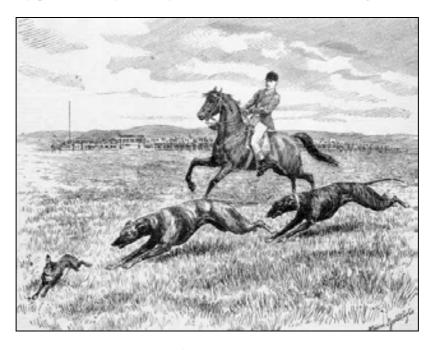
Clarke also set aside several securely fenced paddocks a few miles west of Diggers Rest for breeding hares in semi-captivity. A number were transported to the Plumpton Oval for a coursing meeting, so that there was always plenty of game hidden among the long grass of the enclosure. For the 1883 season Will erected stands, a ladies' enclosure and other improvements, so that 'the VCC Plumpton was a much superior affair...' It was said that: 'none of the most renowned coursing grounds in England equalled the new set-up at Diggers Rest, where the best dog was sure to win.'

The introduction of greyhound racing in the early 1890s caused the demise of Plumpton coursing. In 1894 the VCC closed 'the Oval'. The special fencing and other improvements

636 *ibid*, p.110. (Superior to the Chirnsides' *Werribee Park* copy) 637 *ibid*, p.292

⁶³⁵ *ibid*, p.110

were sold and Clarke's 20 year reign as the coursing king of Victoria came to an end. There is a little evidence of at least two of Clarke's three hare enclosures. The most intact of these, on the back of Mr John Beaty's property on Blackhill Road, consists of the foundations of what was once a very professionally built drystone wall on three sides of a large enclosure.



The Waterloo Cup: The Final Course, 1st August 1892. What looks like a stand is visible in the background. (State Library of Victoria)

It is unlikely that anything other than the site of the Plumpton Oval remains. The site of earlier coursing events is said to have been about half a kilometre north west of the Plumpton Dam. Here is a row of large old pines of an uncommon variety that may be a legacy of Clarke's improvements for these events. The later 'Plumpton' oval is shown on an 1892 map to have been on the square mile section of land on the north-west corner of Plumpton and Holden Roads (where the Houdini memorial is situated). The name 'Plumpton Road' is also testimony to this long-gone historical feature of the Shire's history.

After the formation of the VCC, the sport burgeoned, and numerous new clubs were formed in the Shire. On the 6th May 1876 the Melton Coursing Club was formed at a Raglan Hotel meeting. Messrs. Browne, of *Green Hills*, and Staughton made land available for the club's use. The committee comprised HW Staughton, S Staughton, SG Staughton, and Messrs Robertson, Manning, Graham, Cecil, Browne, Turner, Watson, Johnson E & J, and H Minns. They engaged the best slipper and judge in the business: VCC's Mr Banner. ⁶³⁹

The first meeting was held in June at *Exford*. Membership, local and from Melbourne, increased rapidly, but by 1879 the Club was finding it difficult to obtain nominations and the prizes were reduced. Members were asked if they would continue support at a reduced subscription. Distance from railway station may have been a factor in its lack of success.

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⁶³⁸ Shire Map Series (1892): Parish of Holden

⁶³⁹ Pollitt, op cit, p.54; also Cameron, op cit, p.20

⁶⁴⁰ Macdonald, op cit, p.10

⁶⁴¹ Pollitt, op cit, p.54

For how long this survived is not clear, but coursing regained popularity, and other clubs were established in the Shire. By 1890 one local memoir records that 'Greyhound coursing was usually held on Moylans property Mt Kororoit, or Mt Misery as it was later known. Later still, coursing was held at Melton Park, Mr Matt Carberry was the judge and Percy Cook, the Slipper.' Carberry, 'a genial personality with twinkling eyes and heavy moustache', was 'the key figure in the numerous coursing meetings held picnic style at Melton Park':-

'People came from Melton and local districts by train and horse vehicles. Few cars tackled the rough or muddy roads to the meet ... Well dressed womenfolk and men in bowler hats attended these coursing events which took place several times each season.'643

There is a photograph of attenders of one of Melton's coursing events, taken by 1914 (and well after the period of bowler hats). 644



Melton Coursing Club, probably pre-1914. (Melton & District Historical Society)

John Farrell, farmer, purchased *Melton Park* from Harvey Patterson (himself apparently fond of coursing). The Melton Historical Society has an illuminated presentation entitled '*Melton Park – Footscray District Coursing Club – Farrell Esq, of Melton Park, as a token of Esteem, 20/12/1913*.' Photographs in the presentation include W Minns' 'Black Royal', 'winner'; Miss Farrell's 'Swift Wing', 'runner up'. The success of this Club was later put down to the plentiful hares on the Melton Plains, and the popularity of its judge, the genial Mat Carberry. ⁶⁴⁵

643 Starr, *op cit*, pp.199-200

⁶⁴² Collins, op cit.

⁶⁴⁴ Starr, *op cit*, pp.201-202. They would not have been of the original 'Melton Coursing Club'. The 'Plumpton Paddock' citation of the photographs indicates that it continued to be used locally after the disassembly of buildings in the 1890s.

⁶⁴⁵ Starr, op cit, pp.198, 200

From time to time there were other coursing events and venues in the district. Henry Beattie, the famous Hereford breeder of Mount Aitken, 'in the 70s, before the days of Plumptons, often welcomed a small coterie from Newmarket to private coursing matches on Mt Aitken, with John Murray Peck and Augustus P Rudd as chief organisers. The gathering generally included John Pritchard, Davie Clarke the tall big tanner, and old William Learmonth, the Indian horse buyer, in the company. 646 Coursing contests were also held on the 'Mowbray' property, now part of the Melton Golf Course. Owner Hornbuckle was a great follower of the sport, and was killed in an accident when returning from a *Melton Park* meeting in 1911.⁶⁴⁷ In the 1940s charabancs and furniture vans were employed to bring people to the greyhound coursing held near the site of the Clarke Plumpton. B Joengbloeds also had a coursing track. 649

⁶⁴⁶ Peck, Harry H, Memoirs of a Stockman (Stock and Land Publishing Co, Melbourne, 1972), pp.50-

^{51 647} D & W Beaty, pers. conv. Lord Hopetoun is said to have attended on one occasion.

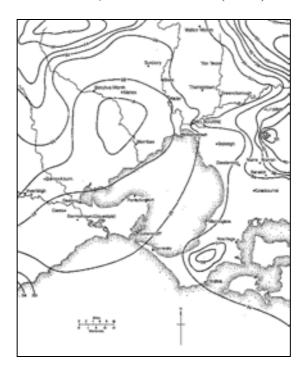
⁶⁴⁸ Mr Charles Watson, personal conversation, 9/12/2005

⁶⁴⁹ G Minns, pers. conv.

CHAPTER NINE: WATER AND FIRE

Dorothea MacKellar's 'sunburnt country ... of droughts and flooding rains', might have been written about Melton. Had the poem been written in the 1860s local farmers might have winced at the lines: 'Core of my heart my country! Her pitiless blue sky, when sick at heart around us, we see her cattle die...'

Melton Shire is a very dry place. It lacks rainfall and has few accessible permanent streams. In 1867 a Victorian government agricultural inspector described Melton as a 'pretty though parched up township. 650 The 'Melton Mallee' woodland along the Djerriwarrh Creek is the only place where mallee vegetation is found south of the Dividing Range.⁶⁵¹ 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 has the lowest rainfall of all, less than 18 inches (46 cm). 652



Average Annual Rainfall (inches). The area below 18 inches is situated south of Melton. (Peel, Rural Industry in the Port Phillip Region, p.9)

For a period in the 1880s the Victorian Municipal Directory's Melton correspondent tried turning the local climate to good account. Melton, he claimed:

"...is well adapted for the recovery of invalids suffering from pulmonary affections, as it is mild in climate, sheltered by neighbouring forests and watered by the romantic Werribee River, on whose banks are beautiful sites for pleasure seekers, and ample stores of materials for scientific research, 653

653 Victorian Municipal Directory, 1887

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⁶⁵⁰ VPP, 1867, Vol.3, 1st Session, 'Report of the Collector of Agricultural Statistics', p.84

⁶⁵¹ See National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Landscape Classification Report. Also Ballarat Courier, 11/6/1983

⁶⁵² Peel, op cit, p.9

The next version noted that:

'Melton has the reputation of being singularly conducive to health, escaping as it does, epidemics which sometimes visit even neighbouring places.' 654

While no sanatoriums are known to have been established in the area, the weather certainly did continue to effect the health of farmers and graziers.

The theme of water conservation pervades the Shire's history. In the rural parts of the Shire, the earliest dwellings, of both pastoralists and farmers, were situated adjacent to watercourses. Later domestic tanks were built to conserve roof water: dug at first, and then built of corrugated metal and erected on timber tank-stands. Pastoralists, notably the Clarkes, progressively repurchased the plains farms that were abandoned in droughts, and much of the Shire reverted to a sheep-run. In the new era of farming in the twentieth century, grains continued to be the main crop in the northern wetter parts, but in the dry south, Melton hay came to be regarded as the best in the country. The Shire's transformed twentieth century dairying industry also depended considerably upon hay in this dry climate, where pasture was often poor. The dryness of the rural areas is most dramatically expressed in the exceptional and probably unique series of large and finely built dry stone dams built on the Rockbank pastoral estate, and in other smaller dry stone dams throughout the municipality.

In Melton township lack of healthy drinking water remained a perennial problem until reticulation arrived, belatedly, in the 1960s. Prior to that, the community had regularly joined together with schemes for town reservoirs, and bores and windmills, most of which were only partially successful. The challenge also stimulated local enterprise, such as the apparently original idea of combining bridge and dams, realised (again without much success) in the McKenzie Street weir. The people also learnt early that formal avenues of exotic ornamental trees in Melton's High Street were doomed, so they replaced their remnants with informal plantings of native species and hardy peppercorns that gave High Street a distinctive character. Watching the water from their Melton (Exford) Dam cause the neighbouring Shire of Werribee to bloom, they fought hard, but again unsuccessfully, for a local irrigation scheme.

The other key aspect of the dry climate was widespread destruction by bushfires. Fires have virtually wiped out different areas at various times. They have destroyed many heritage places, further diminishing the already quite small number of such places in a Shire that was so lightly populated in the nineteenth century. In their place, the development of local fire brigades, an isolated chimney, or perhaps a significant cultural or natural place saved by the brigade, express the area's heritage.

Like all settlers in Australia, the locals learnt the lesson that their puny creeks could periodically become killer torrents. Their deep channels increased the necessity for bridges. The dry plains are poorly drained in parts, and their many swamps have impeded both farming and pastoralism.

Bushfires

It can be presumed that the Melton Shire did not escape the horrendous Black Thursday fires of 6th February 1851, although as few land sales had taken place their local impact may have been limited.

Alex Cameron, one of the early settlers, records another fire not long afterwards:

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⁶⁵⁴ Victorian Municipal Directory, 1889

'One of our largest bush fires seen in Melton was about the year 1855, coming down the Toolern hills and making a clean sweep to the Werribee River and being driven by a north wind there weren't many to stop its progress.'

After putting fire out on own place Mr Tulloh (of *Strathtulloh*) went over and saved *Exford*, as Simon Staughton and his men were away fighting a fire elsewhere. This may have been the 'very bad fire' that 'came across the plains' to William Newnham's Melton farm. While it did not burn them out, it was instrumental in Chandler's wife's religious conversion. Whatever their spiritual repercussions, the fires of the area must have contributed to building the fledgling community. They brought out the generosity, and the courage, of people in the face of such a deadly adversary.

At the time of the 'Black Monday' bushfires of February 1865 Melton was more densely populated with farms, many of which were already struggling. The Agriculture Inspector described it as a 'calamity' for them: 'The Green Hills and Melton district have also suffered severely, the fire consuming the produce of several large farms.' Hjorth remembered the 'very hot day with strong winds':

'...a fire swept down from the ranges on to the plains. It did not represent a solid front but came down in narrow strips trending eastward to the Toolern Road where the advance was checked. Meantime the main body of the fire swept the plains down to Melton, burning out some farmers, and it also entered the cemetery, but as it was getting towards evening and the wind lulled, its further progress was checked at Ballarat Road.'658

John Chandler gives a lengthy first-hand account of this fire:

'As it was coming towards my neighbour's stacks [hay] we ran out to meet it with wet bags to knock the grass out, but it came across the plains as fast as a horse could gallop. It was as high as our heads, and we could only jump over it and let it go. The stacks and stables were all burned down in less time than it takes me to write...'

Athough able to save the house, they were 'exhausted with heat, smoke, and exertion, and were helpless to save anything'. Everything else was destroyed. He then turned to his own farm and family:

'The fire had run right down to my place. My neighbour, who lived between me and the ranges, had ploughed a broad land at the top of his ground, and as the fire jumped over this, he and his family put it out with wet bags, and so saved his stacks etc, and that saved mine...

In the evening the wind changed and was bringing the fire back on us on the other side of my farm; but all the neighbours got down and met it, and saved us...'

A subscription was got up in the town for those who were ruined by the fire.⁶⁵⁹

Ironically, it would seem that this fire was responsible for one of the Shire's most outstanding heritage places. Around this time 'Big' Clarke is reported to have found that many of his

656 Chandler, op cit, p.85

659 Chandler, op cit, pp.174-5

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⁶⁵⁵ Cameron, op cit, p.26

⁶⁵⁷ VPP, 1864-65, op cit, pp.89-90

⁶⁵⁸ Hiorth, op cit.

improvements at Rockbank had been destroyed by 'a fire'. He commissioned a new manager's residence, new workmen's cottages, and a new 22-stand shearing shed, which remains today. 660

The dry country must also have made it more difficult to save individual places caught in the small localised fires that broke out from time to time. There are numerous stories of valuable haystacks being destroyed. For example, a 200 ton haystack in the town, owned by the proprietor of the Raglan hotel, caught fire one night, but 'with very little water at hand very little of it was saved.' As already recorded, most of the chaff mills in the area were burned down at least once. And, apart from Toolern Vale, a number of schools were also destroyed by fire, including Kororoit (c.1877), and Sydenham West (1945).



The local fire brigade in the 1962 centenary celebrations of the Shire. Ryan's Royal Hotel (at that time Radford's fruit shop) at rear. The parade became the annual Djerriwarrh Festival; and collection for the fire brigade was one of its features. (M&DHS)

A Melton Fire Brigade was established in 1935. In 1966 the Fire Brigade's Mt Cottrell Group was formed. As a voluntary operation, the fire brigade was a focus of the rural community. The Barrie family has had a particularly long association with the brigade. From their Ferris Road home (now only plantings remaining), Bon and Edna Barrie inaugurated the use of two-way radio in the fire district, and operated it for many years. 663

On 14th January 1944 a fire that stretched from Woodend to the Gap destroyed 30 houses and devastated the Couangalt area just north of the Shire. Melton Shire property owners, Messrs Borbidge, Gilligan, Millett, had narrow escapes. The Toolern Brigade working on the west side of the front were unable to prevent 2100 acres of Mr Scott's Mount Aitken estate, and its historic 14 room bluestone house, being burnt out. But they stopped the flames just to the south, on the doorstep of Mr Townsing's farm (originally the Beaty's Rocklands), where 700

⁶⁶⁰ Clarke (1995), op cit, p.36

⁶⁶¹ Cameron, op cit, p.14. Grieves case is another example of hay destruction (Starr, op cit, pp.213-4)

⁶⁶² Starr, op cit, pp.213-4

⁶⁶³ Edna Barrie, pers.conv. 30/5/02

tons of hay was stacked. Mr R Benson also lost a house.⁶⁶⁴ It may also have been this fire that destroyed the timber part of the cottage on the Shire boundary on Blackhill Road.⁶⁶⁵

In 1952 a fire swept down from Trentham and killed Mrs Wilson on the *Glencoe* property on Blackhills Road. The fire destroyed a bluestone homestead on the Gisborne-Melton Road that remains as a ruin today. The fire burnt out the whole Black Hill forest, and all hands who happened to be in the area, including a taxi driver and a priest, fought to save property. Leo Tarleton staged a successful fight to save the McPhersons Road timber bridge; it is still in place. Two weeks later a deluge washed away the exposed thin topsoil of the Black Ranges, changing the ecology of the area.

In early March 1965, there was another devastating fire in the Shire in which Toolern Vale was almost wiped out. Only three of 18 houses in the village escaped the flames, and 14 were destroyed. The post office, general store, school, Mechanic's Institute, and church were also destroyed. The 22 children at the school were sent home about 15 minutes before flames swept into the town. The fire burnt through to Rockbank. Melton was saved by the rape crops on the north side of the town, which stopped the flames. The front page of the Age told that 22 Melton and Bacchus Marsh volunteer firefighters had nearly been incinerated trying to stop the fire near the Keilor Road.



The 'scene of devastation after the disastrous Toolern Vale fire'. The fire destroyed (The Age, 12th March 1965.)

⁶⁶⁴ Gisborne Gazette, 21st January 1944

⁶⁶⁵ Heritage Study Place No.61. Mrs B Foard, personal conversation, 11/1/2006. (Mrs Foard stated that the fire that partly destroyed this building swept through the area in 1945.)

⁶⁶⁶ Ian Hunt, pers. conv. 6/3/02

Alan Ermel, pers. conv. 6/3/02

⁶⁶⁸ Leo Tarleton, 8/1/02

⁶⁶⁹ Alan Ermel, pers. conv. 6/3/02

⁶⁷⁰ Starr, op cit, p.214

⁶⁷¹ Bruce Knox, personal conversation.

⁶⁷² The Age, 12th March 1965

In 1966 fire again swept down on Toolern Vale from the north, burning all the way to Rockbank. A relic remaining from this wreckage is the bluestone ruin on the west side of the Gisborne Melton Road, south of McPherson Road. A separate fire that same summer burnt south from just north of Toolern Vale.

In January 1968 a catastrophic fire, thought to have begun on the new Chartwell Estate, swept through the Truganina district: 'These fires left few homesteads standing, and even the old stone buildings exploded in the terrific heat, leaving only heaps of rubble on the plains.' The Truganina school, and hall (both over the southern boundary of Melton Shire) were two of the 45 buildings that are believed to have been destroyed. As the fire burnt south and east most of the destruction was on the other side of the Shire boundary: the Hopkins' *Rocklands*, and McNaughton's *Tibbermore* both had narrow escapes.



Columns of smoke engulf the remains of Cockbill's pig slaughterhouse / bacon works, between Beatty's Road and the Western Highway. (The Sun, 12th March 1965). The bluestone building in the bottom left corner (Fulham Park, Place No.316) is all that survives today.

⁶⁷³ Ian Hunt, pers. conv. 6/3/02

⁶⁷⁴ Murray, E, *The Plains of Iramoo* (self-published, Geelong, 1974), p.99

⁶⁷⁵ Wendy Bitans, pers.conv. There seems to be some confusion about the year, some sources referring to the 1969 fire. The Truganina fire was on the same day as the separate Lara fire, which tragically killed 5 people.



Built in 1869 as Derrimut Common School No. 192. Destroyed in bushfire 100 years later. (Werribee and District Historical Society)

A disastrous fire in January 1985 destroyed 13 houses to the west of Melton; not a fence remained between the Djerriwarrh Creek and Melton. A concrete dome on The Bullock Track is all that remains of the Robinson house that was one the houses destroyed. The Age front page featured a photograph of the blazing Robinson hay stack. The fire also finished off the brick and stone stables that was the only remaining building associated with the Staughton's *Brooklyn* homestead.



Captains of the Toolern Vale Rural Fire Brigade gather at the 75th Anniversary Celebration, 11th November 2000. (Back Row:- Tom Wood, Don Bradbury, Eddie Gillespie, Bert Storey, Bob Beaty, Front Row: Front Row: Trevor McNair and David Lee.)

Floods:

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⁶⁷⁶ Jeff Robinson, pers. conv.; Starr, *op cit*, p.213. It is elsewhere stated that this fire was in 1983 (Lack, Ford, *op cit*, p.129)

It would appear that the Melton area was particularly hit in Melbourne's 1849 floods. In addition to the drownings and widespread havoc, 'there was a great loss of sheep, over 50,000 on the rivers Exe and Werribee, Deep Creek and other places, and amongst the settlers who suffered heavily were Messrs. Aitken, Yuille, Staughton, Riddell, Hamilton and Learmonth.'677

On 21st May 1852, Edward Davey Wedge and his wife and daughter were swept away and drowned by the Werribee River which had broken its banks and engulfed their homestead. 678

Ironically, in 1863, the middle of the early 1860s drought, there was a huge flood which put the Toolam Toolern creek under water and caused a number of drownings. The worst incident was when the Bacchus Marsh to Sydenham coach capsized in 'the blind gully' where it joined the main creek, drowning two passengers. There were numerous drownings in the flooding creeks of the area over the years, night time being particularly dangerous. ⁶⁸⁰

In 1880 floods washed away Staughtons Bridge across the Werribee in the very south of the Shire.

Watering Melton Township

Even though the 1860s drought when the West Bourke Agricultural Inspector described Melton as 'a pretty, though parched up township', Melton was still clearly a notably dry place. ⁶⁸¹

Both rural and townspeople were forced to walk distances for this basic commodity. Hjorth recollected the township in its very early days:

'The water supply was very deficient; a few had iron tanks, and some under-ground ones. After a lengthy spell of dry weather, the creek had to be depended on, and that supply often got exhausted near the village, but a mile to the south of it, there was generally a good supply to be got in the creek.'

These stories have survived through generations of local family lore. Jeff Robinson's great grandmother Mrs Raleigh carried water in buckets from a stream 'at least a mile away' to their Harkness Road house in dry periods. This is clearly an event that was burdensome enough to have lived on in story, and yet the Robinson family was more fortunate than many in living relatively close to the Djerriwarrh Creek. Together with the Werribee River it would have been one of the more reliable streams in the area.

The Toolern Toolam Creek, like most southern Australian creeks, was temperamental, prone to major floods, but usually puny. When it dried up, or was too far away, the alternative was to purchase water, the price for this scarce commodity in the 1860s being 2 shillings per 50 gallon cask. On the road across Keilor Plains in the goldrush times John Chandler and his

⁶⁷⁷ Garryowen, op cit, p.216

⁶⁷⁸ Bride, op cit, p.85

⁶⁷⁹ Cameron, *op cit*, p.5; Chandler, *op cit*, p.171 thought four passengers were drowned in this incident. See also Chandler, *op cit*, pp.177-178

⁶⁸⁰ Cameron, op cit, p.23

⁶⁸¹ Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1867, Vol.3, 1st Session, pp.83-84.

⁶⁸² Bob Macdonald, 'History of Melton', unpublished typescript, MDHS, c.1969, p.6

companion, 'nearly famished', had paid 10 shillings for five buckets of water, which they shared with their horses. ⁶⁸³

The problem was a constant topic of discussion within the town in the 1860s. Surveys were prepared for expensive water supply schemes with capacity of a million gallons, costing thousands, sometimes tens of thousands, of pounds which, it was hoped, 'would claim the attention of government'. In June 1868 a meeting held 'for the purpose of providing Melton with water and for supervision of the town reserve' appointed a committee of nine men, (including Mr A Shebler, who was still promoting the cause 30 years later). 684

Builder Mr Shebler, a well known Melton identity, apparently tired quickly of committees, as in 1869 he is reported to have erected, at his own cost, 'a dam at the eastern end of the township where the Toolern Creek crosses the main road ... Mr Shebler claims it will hold ½ million gallons.' For his trouble the Council fined him £1 for cutting down trees during its construction. It is likely that this was literally a dam across the creek, rather than the 'tank' (as paddock dams were generally referred to in those days) that is the reservoir in the Hannah Watts Park today.

'The reservoir' is reported by one Melton memorialist as having been constructed during the term of a Mr James Meek Nicholson as Shire Secretary, the overseer being Mr Peter Atley, who later became a Shire councillor.⁶⁸⁶ The Melton *Express* reports that the first sod of the 'water reservoir' was turned in September 1879.

There are however conflicting accounts of the date of construction of the reservoir, ranging from 1876 to 1882; works of one sort or another were probably carried on over a number of years. One of the first local historians described it as having been an earth reservoir built in 1877, 'adjacent to the creek', providing for water to be carried manually for domestic use. A different, more detailed and probably more accurate reference from the same author states that 'the reservoir' was completed in 1882. It was thought that 'with the considerable amount spent', it would not only be 'a work of great local importance', but a 'benefit for the travelling public.'

There may have been a number of water schemes engineered around the Toolern Creek at the east end of town. The ultimate outcome of it all was the present earth 'tank', which is the duckpond in the present Hannah Watts Park. An 1892 map marks the site of the present Hannah Watts Park, on which this dam is situated, as 'Reservoir'. This reservoir was fed by a gravity pipe from a brick dam on Toolern Creek, just downstream of the bridge, the water flowing to the tank/reservoir in times of flood. All that survives of this is a bluestone structure that probably housed the inlet pipe. 690

⁶⁸³ Chandler, John (Michael Cannon, ed) *Forty Years in the Wilderness* (Loch Haven, Arthurs Seat, 1990), p.78. Ten shillings was a very good days wage at the time.

ibid

 $^{^{685}}$ The Melton Express, 16/10/1869

⁶⁸⁶ Alex Cameron, 'Melton Memoirs' typescript, MDHS, p.12/

⁶⁸⁷ Robert Macdonald, 'A History of Melton', typescript held by MDHS, c.1969

⁶⁸⁸ Bob Macdonald, 'History of Melton, October 1969, typescript held by MDHS, p.11

⁶⁸⁹ Shire Map Series, Map No.25, 1892

⁶⁹⁰ Mr Ray Radford, personal conversation, 7/11/2005



Hannah Watts Park, the old Reservoir. (David Moloney)

Within a few years of its construction however the water was said to have been rendered unsuitable for human consumption by 'sludge' coming down the creek, the cleaning out of which Council set aside annual budgets 1884-1890.⁶⁹¹ Farmers used it to fill up troughs and tanks for animals. As a town reservoir it was clearly not an immediate or unqualified success: the water problem continued to occupy the minds of the townspeople and councillors. On the 18th January 1884 Mr A Blackwood, blacksmith, led a delegation that:

'begged that the Council would do all in their power to get a supply of water into the township, and let it cost what it may, the people should have water, if it was possible to obtain it, as the Reservoir did not seem to be likely to meet the demand'. ⁶⁹²

Despite its problems the reservoir apparently met at least part of the demand for water. In August 1905 the local paper reported contentedly that 'the township reservoir is now full, and it makes a very nice sheet of water.' ⁶⁹³

In the late 1880s a new solution to the water problem was contemplated. A ratepayers meeting organised a deputation to inquire whether the boring plant being used to build the Melton Railway Viaduct might be used to bore for water. A geologists report thought that water could be found at 500 feet depth, and the government offered to pay half the cost. ⁶⁹⁴ Within a few years another public meeting heard of three proposals for a Melton water supply: boring; pumping water from the Werribee River; and constructing a large reservoir on MI Brown's property (*Green Hills*) and piping it into the town, which, it was considered, would be the cheapest and most reliable. ⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹³ The *Express*, 19/8/1905

⁶⁹¹ Council Minutes, 1884-1890.

 $^{^{692}}$ MDHS

⁶⁹⁴ Macdonald, op cit, p.12

⁶⁹⁵ *ibid*, p.13



Weir, Nixon Street Melton, built 1890. An original response to the water need that didn't quite work. It was thought that instead of just building a bridge, a weir would serve two purposes. (David Moloney)

Still nothing eventuated. In 1892 Harvey Patterson of the *Melton Park* Estate had brought the government diamond drill to the district to look for gold. Cameron explains:

'While the diamond drill was in the district, a meeting of ratepayers was held, the Shire Council being approached to put down two or three bores to see if we could get water. The Council passed a rate of three pence in the pound and I collected about £70. One bore was put down in McCorkell's Lane in the north riding, one on the Toolern Road [near Robinson's *Creighton*] and one near the Weslyan Chruch also one near the Toolern Creek [on the present Golf Course] which was got through Mr ST Staughton our local member. ... A ratepayers meeting was called to see if we could collect some funds to put a pump and a windmill on the latter one...'

Over £7 was collected, and Braybrook Shire contributed £5, which was more than enough to construct the pump. 'It being good mineral water, the cattle and horses would run to the trough to get a drink'. ⁶⁹⁶ In 1899 a 'Water Supply Reserve', not quite 2 acres in area, was gazetted in Melton, on the west bank of Toolern Creek, on the north side of High Street. ⁶⁹⁷ 'The discovery of underground water was of the greatest benefit'. ⁶⁹⁸

In 1898 the 'Melton Water Supply Committee' wrote asking for Council's assistance with the windmill and bore, and Council took over the site that year. The facility appears only to have been used in dry times, and maintenance soon became a problem. After it was demolished by wind the Council replaced it with a heavier one. A local editorial in 1905 conceded that the windmill was not a proposition to repair, but encouraged the Council to maintain the 'stand and pipe', and apply to the Water Supply Department for a small oil engine as a pump. ⁶⁹⁹ Years

⁶⁹⁶ Cameron, *op cit*, pp.24-25

^{697 &#}x27;Township of Melton, Parish of Djerriwarrh'

⁶⁹⁸ Alex Cameron, 'Melton Memoirs', typescript, pp.24-25; George Minns, 'Looking Back' (M&DHS Newsletter, January 2001).

⁶⁹⁹ The Bacchus Marsh Express, 19/8/1905.

later, when the Council decided to sell the windmill and tank there was disappointment in the community, some of whom apparently appreciated its historic significance.⁷⁰⁰

In the end the town had had to resort to the same windmill and dam ('tank') solution that sustained the rural parts of the Shire. Maps in 1916 and 1938 showed the locations of many scores of 'waterhole' (presumably a small dam, or more correctly 'tank') and associated 'windmill' in the Shire. The small township was able to support three 'tank makers' – Messrs Cecil, Shebler and Collins. The small township was able to support three 'tank makers' – Messrs Cecil, Shebler and Collins.

A desperate struggle to find a better solution to the problem continued however, and a bold, apparently original solution, was attempted. The Shire Secretary suggested that where bridge works were planned, consideration should be given to building a weir instead, thereby providing water as well as a vehicle stream crossing. Several sites were investigated around the Shire, but Melton's McKenzie Street 'weir and ford' (1890) was the only one constructed. Although there were many skeptics, it was hoped that it would provide both a stream crossing and a water supply. Its dammed water would be channelled into the reservoir about half a kilometre upstream. This structure is still standing and used as a road, and is substantial testimony to the key issue of water in Melton, and an original attempt to resolve the problem.

However its success in providing a useful water storage was, once more, equivocal. In 1895 a correspondent to the local newspaper noted that the water in the reservoir 'is going down fast and but a few inches remain. The reservoir ought to be condemned. It is 19 years since it was constructed and it ought to be a good reservoir.'704

In April 1898 it was necessary for yet another 'water committee' to be formed 'to investigate the provision of water for the town'. In December it was reported that a meeting at J Robinson's house at Toolern had endorsed a proposal to sink 'a shaft on the Toolern to Melton Road close to the bore that was put down some time ago'. (This would have been in 1892.) The meeting enthusiastically resolved to collect money to enable the bore, which it was hoped would 'supply the district with a good supply of water'. In 1909 when Premier Murray visited the Shire he was asked if the 'boring plant' could be kept in the district.

The shortage of town water continued, and times of drought (such as in the 1920s, see below) brought renewed energy for a new resolution of the district's water supply problems. But nothing changed. A 1954 promotional screed on the town stated: 'We have no water supply, residents being dependent on tanks and wells. There is however, artesian and bore water available in many parts of the Shire.'

The dependence on bore and tank water remained until the arrival of reticulated water in the 1960s. The Municipal Directory of 1962 noted that a 'Water Supply Scheme for Melton and Melton South is under investigation – gravity pipe line from proposed reservoir on Djerriwarrh creek.' In 1968 the directory was able to report: 'Water Supply Scheme for Melton and Melton South now in operation.' 709

⁷⁰⁰ Cameron, op cit, p.25

⁷⁰¹ Commonwealth Department of Defence 1 inch to 1 mile maps: 'Sunbury 1916'; 'Sunbury 1938'

⁷⁰² Collins, op cit.

⁷⁰³ MDHS Notes.

⁷⁰⁴ The *Melton Express*, 2/4/1895

⁷⁰⁵ The *Melton Express*, 6/4/1898

⁷⁰⁶ The *Melton Express*, 10/12/1898

⁷⁰⁷ The *Melton Express*, 27/3/1909

 $^{^{708}}$ MDHS

⁷⁰⁹ Victorian Municipal Directory, 1962, 1968

The 'Water Scheme' Campaign - Irrigation and Town Water Supplies

In 1916 the Melton Weir was constructed by the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission to provide irrigation water. Its capacity was increased in 1937. Although situated in the Shire of Melton, the irrigation water from Melton (or Exford) Weir was for Werribee, not Melton. Melton farmers believed that if water could be added to the good volcanic soil of the area, production would boom.



Melton Reservoir in Flood [c.1930 - c.1947] (State Rivers and Water Supply Commission / State Library of Victoria)

By 1887 the tantalising mirage of irrigation hovered as the solution to the area's water troubles:

'The Melton Shire is specially adapted for irrigation, being for the most part level plains running south from the ranges which form the southern spurs of Mount Macedon. If these plains were watered Melton would be transformed into the garden of the colony; the soil being good, anything could be grown.'⁷¹¹

This was the era of grand irrigation proposals throughout Victoria, with their attendant dreams of a yeomanry, and implicit hostility to the large pastoralists. In the 1889 entry this vision is explicit:

'A properly conceived and well executed scheme of irrigation would be very beneficial, but owing, probably, to much of the land being in large holdings, nothing has been attempted in this direction.' 712

By at least the 1920s this goal had formed into a public campaign for a Melton water scheme. The year 1929 appears to have been a critical one. The local newspaper reported that all were

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⁷¹⁰ Pollitt, op cit, p.58

⁷¹¹ Victorian Municipal Directory, 1887

⁷¹² *ibid*, 1889

anxiously awaiting a report, upon which everything would depend, into the cost of 'the proposed Water Scheme'. It encouraged residents, including townspeople, to attend meetings and 'Vote YES' to the scheme, which was

'... of vital importance, not only to the farming community, but to every resident. The future development of Melton depends on the action of the residents in this matter ... The last four years experience of the want of sufficient water should convince anyone that this kind of existence should be finished with ... Water means wealth and prosperity to any district, and it is a necessity which cannot be done without.'713

The proposal was for 'a domestic supply', as well as 'a small irrigation scheme' which would enable farmers to irrigate about 10 acres each. Increased land values were envisaged, and new industries 'would spring up'.

The leading proponent of the scheme appears to have been Cr Casey. John W Casey, who had a farm on Water Reserve Road Rockbank, was a Councillor in both the Braybrook and Melton Shire Councils. He was a member of the Australian Natives Association for 69 years, and held the position of President of the local branch for many years. He was an ardent supporter of the 'water for Melton scheme' participating in the many activities arranged to attempt to secure permanent water for the district. His long life (he died at the age of 90 years) were insufficient for him to see the scheme brought to fruition.

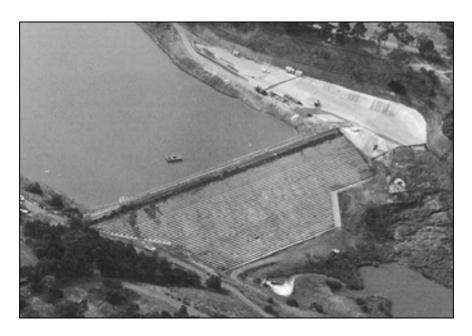
At the April 1929 Council meeting Cr Casey argued that this was the only opportunity that Meltonians would have to secure water, although they should realise that 'they would have to pay for it'. Water storages on Riddells and Jacksons creeks would supply Diggers Rest and Melton (this was apparently the 'Little Scotland scheme'), while the Konagaderrer [sic] scheme (a proposed dam on Deep Creek west of Donnybrook) would serve 'the locality across Sydenham and Rockbank to the Werribee south of Melton.' He urged residents to meet before the release of the report into costs to plan its response; Councillors agreed to establish a 'Vigilance Committee' to look out for the Melton Shire's interest in the forthcoming debate on the report.⁷¹⁵ Although a topic of local debate for many years, the scheme did not eventuate.

⁷¹³ The *Express*, 27/4/1929

⁷¹⁴ Mrs Veronica Fitzpatrick, Bacchus Marsh, grand-daughter, August 2005



Melton Weir, 1954. (State Rivers and Water Supply Commission).



The present Melton Reservoir (1993). (M&DHS)

Household Water Supply:- Underground and Iron Tanks

Most rural properties had either underground or corrugated iron domestic water tanks, and sometimes both. Provision of a domestic water supply was critical to the establishment of any rural property not beside a permanent supply of water. 'The first essential was to secure a

reliable water supply. Unless the farm bordered a permanent creek ... the selector had to dig a dam for his animals and a well [sic] for the household supply. ⁷¹⁶

Underground domestic 'wells', many with distinctive concrete rendered domes, can be seen around the Shire, sometimes isolated, or in conjuction with a brick chimney – the only structures to have survived a bushfire. They illustrate a form of water collection and infrastructure no longer practised, and are of particular heritage significance in low-rainfall Melton. Although popularly called 'wells', in Melton these are mostly all 'tanks' which, rather than tapping groundwater, are sealed cisterns for the storage of water from the roofs of buildings. 717

Underground tanks became only generally necessary in Australia from the 1850s, when increased population and Crown land sales ensured that many dwellings were unable to locate beside a stream. (Relics of early farms and early plans both indicate that in the 1850s the cottages of farms with stream frontages were all situated beside the stream, rather than near the road as occurred later. These relics are of special interest for this relationship with water.)

Also in these goldrush years, the mass introduction into Australia of the new product 'corrugated iron' made it feasible for ordinary people to be able to channel water into the underground tanks from roofs and guttering. Underground tanks on small properties generally seem to have been located at the rear of the house; this might have enabled the roof runoff from dairy and other nearby farm outbuildings to also feed the tank.

The construction of wells goes back thousands of years, and designs for underground wells and tanks, such as contained in JC Loudon's *Encyclopaedia of Agriculture*, had been available to English farmers since at least the early nineteenth century. These generally advocated cigar shaped cross-sections, with the domed top being mostly underground. Evidence of early Melton tanks indicates that local tanks had vertical walls, and no domed covers. Most appear to have been constructed of local stone rather than brick, and without a low wall (as in romantic images of European wells) to ensure safety. Isolation and cost probably meant that they may have been sunk by the property-owners, at least in the case of early small farms. Some of these tanks now have corrugated iron gable covers over the tanks (perhaps added later as a result of gradual modernisation.)

While domes were advocated in early British architectural literature, they appear to have only begun to be built in Australia in the 1860s. At that time there was a growing realisation of the dangers of uncovered wells and tanks in terms of sanitation, as well as safety. Unclean water could wash into uncovered tanks from dairies, and sometimes from cesspits, and vermin also obtained easy access:-

'The typical countrywoman of the early days hardly moved a step from her threshold "to cast away indescribable filth". The contents of chamber pots, vegetable peelings, grease-laden water – all festered around the hut and blended with the nearby latrine to create a "peculiarly offensive" odour which attracted swarms of flies. Sometimes the fluids

⁷¹⁶ Cannon, Michael, *Life in the Country: Australia in the Victorian Age: 2* (Nelson, West Melbourne, 1978), p.149

⁷¹⁷ There were apparently a few wells. Mrs Edna Barrie (personal conversation, 305/2002) advises that a 118 feet deep well provided brackish water for her former house in Ferris Road (Place No.198).

Hughes, Trueman, Ludlow, 'Wells and Underground Tanks', prepared for the Heritage Council of NSW (nd), *passim*; Cannon, *op cit*, p.150

⁷¹⁹ J.C. Loudon, *Encyclopaedia of Agriculture*, Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman, London, 1826.

soaked through the soil into the well [sic], so that the family suffered from an intermittent "low typhoid" fever whose cause they did not suspect.'720

In 1885 Martins Home and Farm described uncovered underground tanks and wells as 'the family rat-trap'. 721 'Common infections of the nineteenth century, such as typhoid, scarlet fever, diphtheria (which was known to have proved tragically fatal in the case of Melton's Kerr, Moloney and Wood families), tuberculosis and gastro-enteritis, spread rapidly in many country towns Efficient disposal of human excreta was a major problem., The connection between water pollution and public health, in particular diseases like dysentery, typhoid and even cholera were beginning to be appreciated. 723

At the same time, technology was contributing to better health. As long as a bucket was necessary to draw water, it was not possible to cover the tops of tanks, or at best only to provide a rudimentary cover. Once a small and reasonably priced pump became available there was no further need for an open tank. The availability of domestic hand-pumps grew in the 1850s, and by 1860 NSW public buildings (schools and railway stations) specified domes as the standard form of construction for tanks. 724 It is also highly likely that the increasing access to good quality bricks, professional bricklaying skills, and cement, over the course of the late nineteenth century contributed to the proliferation of covered tanks in places like Melton.

The new tanks were still circular in plan, but constructed of brick, with approximately 9 inches of clay puddle behind the brick wall to keep the tank water-tight. The hemispherical dome, or segment of a dome, was also constructed with bricks. Both the interior of the tank and the exterior of the dome were cement rendered according to recommended practice. 725 Without internal inspection it is not known whether the cross-section of the tanks typically remained vertical, or cigar-shaped, which were both described in textbooks. Numerous domes in Melton appear to be segmental spheres, rather than hemispheres, and may have spread underneath the surface to a wider diameter tank cylinder, as per the textbooks. The domes were provided with a manhole on top (covered with a concrete cover), of minimum width 16 inches, to provide access for cleaning. Mr Jeff Robinson of Melton West recalls entering the tank on the family farm to repair internal render. The opening also enabled the cool water to be used for refrigeration: perishables and jellies (for setting) were lowered into the water in a bucket. 727

The only known Australian heritage study of underground tanks (conducted in NSW), claims that they were only superseded by the familiar corrugated iron tanks (on tankstands to provide water pressure) in the 1890s, when 'the galvanised above-ground tank was in widespread use. '728 In Victoria however Miles Lewis claims that 'the corrugated iron rainwater tank was manufactured in Melbourne by the later 1850s, and spread very rapidly despite claims that the zinc coating would poison the water. Anders Hjorth's recollections of Melton in the 1860s

⁷²⁰ Cannon, *op cit*, p.151

⁷²¹ Cited in Hughes et al, op cit, p.19.

⁷²² Cannon, *op cit*, pp.255-6

⁷²³ Hughes et al, op cit, pp.19-24

⁷²⁴ *ibid*, pp.32-33

⁷²⁵ Eg, Albrecht, CE, Measurements and Dimensions of Tanks and Dams (Melbourne, Arnell and Jackson [1885?]), pp.30-33 ⁷²⁶ Mr Jeff Robinson, personal conversation, 14/2/2006. This contradicts the Hughes *et al* survey of

tanks in NSW, which found that internal render was rare in domestic tanks (pp.55-56).

⁷²⁷ Hughes et al, op cit, pp.32-80.

Hughes et al, op cit. (Austral Archaeology also conducted a study of early Chinese wells on the Koorong, South Australia.)

⁷²⁹ Lewis, Miles, Physical Investigation of a Building: National Trust Technical Bulletin 9.1 (National Trust of Australia, Victoria, 1989).

state that: 'The water supply was very deficient; a few had iron tanks, and some under-ground ones.' He may however have been referring to the square plate-metal 'ships tanks' (shipping containers, usually for foodstuffs, that were built in Britain for recycling in this manner) that are most usually found these days on larger properties, rather than larger corrugated steel version which became more common. A survey of remaining underground tanks on ninenteenth century Melton properties might reveal the extent to which galvanised iron (or steel) header tanks might have been used as an alternative to underground tanks. We know that underground tanks continued to be built in the early twentieth century, and that today there are many properties that have both underground tanks (most not in use) and corrugated steel header tanks. As access to hand, petrol or electric pumps permitted, they may have been used in conjunction.

While domes probably became widespread from the 1860s for domestic use, it cannot be categorically inferred that the absence of a dome means that the tank was built before that time. On the other hand, the presence of a dome does not necessarily mean that the tank was built after this time, as apparently the building of a dome over a tank often took place many years after the original construction.⁷³¹ The best assumption that can be made in terms of dating tanks is that, water being essential to habitation, they were built at or very soon after the construction of the original dwelling on a site.

Tankbuilders known to have operated in Melton in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries include WA Cecil, Tom Collins (c.1890-1913), and Augustus Schebler ('known for his workmanship' according to Collins).⁷³²

Watering Stock

For carriers passing through in the 1850s, the plains area was notoriously dry. Chandler describes a trip up Mount Alexander Road, in hot sun, without shelter or water. On arriving at Aitkens Gap the two men paid ten shillings for five buckets of water, which they shared with their four horses. 'The sufferings of poor animals crossing Keilor Plains with heavy loads in those days was very great, for there was no water to be got,' he concluded.

In the final phase of horse transport in the early twentieth century, a horse trough was constructed near the chaff mills at Melton South. Wagons and drays began to line up at Wards mill at 2am to offload hay.⁷³³ The trough, on the corner of Station Street and Brooklyn Road, is gone but the nearby peppercorn may be a legacy of the trough, and a tribute to the thirsty work performed by farm animals on the plains.

The early Crown subdivisions of the land gazetted Water Reserves primarily on Kororoit Creek. Mostly they were at road crossing points, but sometimes they terminated dedicated right-of-ways. These were designed to provide for travelling livestock as it passed along the roads to the Melbourne markets, and also small farmers on the dry plains. Some of these reserves became sites for other public uses, such as the Catholic then State schools beside the Kororoit Creek on Holden Road. Despite a program of land sales over the past few decades, many of these reserves survive. In nineteenth and early twentieth century Selection Act and Closer Settlement Board subdivisions seem to have acknowledged that Water Reserves would prove valuable for the new small farmers in the area. For example, the (then) Shire of Braybrook objected strongly to the sale of the water reserve on the Werribee River, with the result that only a small portion of the reserve was subdivided for selection. And in the

⁷³⁰ Hjorth, Anders, 'Recollections of Melton 1861-67', in M&DHS Newsletter, February 2001.

⁷³¹ Hughes et al, op cit, p.3

⁷³² Robinson, *op cit*; also Tom Collins memoirs, part of which were reproduced in the M&DSH Newsletter of December 2000.

⁷³³ Vines, *op cit*, p.5

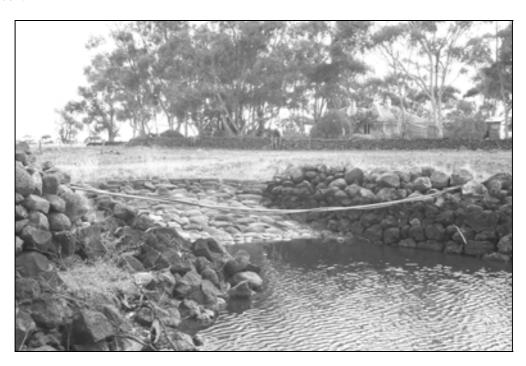
twentieth century, William Taylor's Overnewton Estate subdivision included access to a large existing dam (west of Gourlay Road) by means of a public Right of Way from Taylors Road. ⁷³⁴ Such surviving places are a significant part of the Shire's heritage.

In 1880 it was acknowledged that farming in Melton Shire suffered from a lack of water. But at this stage it apparently was not realised that the rainfall of the area was significantly lower than elsewhere in the region:

'The land is fair agricultural in portions, but the country being very open is very much exposed, and though doubtless an average rainfall takes place, yet the moisture is quickly evaporated, and crops often fail from this cause'. 735

Anders Hjorth's story is instructive of the difficulties of farming created by Melton's temperamental water supply. As a new small farmer, and talented gardener, he had married and pitched his tent on Toolern Creek, where he presumed he would have good water to grow vegetables and tobacco. He tells:

'But some seasons, when I wanted water for my plants, there was none in the creek! At other times again the creek would come down in a big flood, surrounding the tent.' So in 1867 he moved to the Djerriwarrh Creek forest where 'we would be safer from floods, and where there was always an abundance of water and firewood.' He established a small but remarkable irrigation system for his garden, and prospered. His orchard terraces and stone irrigation dam survive. (Ralph Parkinson also had an orchard of several acres on Djerriwarrh Creek.⁷³⁶



Hopkins' dam built to classic design on smaller farming property in dry south (David Moloney)

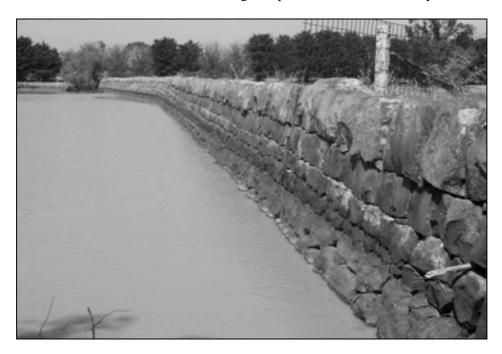
⁷³⁴ Parish Plan (Maribyrnong); Ordnance Map, 1916; Shire Map,1892

⁷³⁵ Victorian Municipal Directory, 1880

⁷³⁶ Ford, 'Rural Activity in Melbourne's West', op cit, p.6

Shortage of water also affected the pastoralists. Pastoralists' first 'permanent improvements' after obtaining security of tenure were erecting fences and sinking waterholes.⁷³⁷ This was particularly important in the low-rainfall Shire of Melton.

On the Rockbank station the Clarkes (probably son Sir William John) addressed the problem by constructing a series of dams, some very substantial in size, stretching from the north to the south of the Shire. In most of the Shire excavation is extremely difficult as there is a blanket of hard rock very close to the surface. As a consequence many dams were built in the area, consisting of shallow excavations of earth, and with fieldstone shoring (or sometimes finely constructed drystone walls) protecting earthen embankments that were constructed across gullies small enough not to be threatened by floods (overflows were a part of the design). The Clarkes' largest dams, at Plumpton Road, and Taylors Road, are outstanding examples of professionally built drystone walls using roughly squared and shaped stones. Other large masonry pastoral dams in Victoria are not presently known, and the Melton examples are splendid monuments to the Shire's distinctive climate and topography. They are a major, distinctive, and perhaps unique legacy of the pastoral era in Victoria. They express the need for a permanent water supply within 3 or 4 miles of sheep pastures, and the major role of the *Rockbank* station in fattening sheep for the Newmarket saleyard.



The Clarkes' 'Plumpton Dam' at Diggers Rest. A fine dry stone wall construction. (David Moloney)

Despite the widespread shallow bedrock, in less rocky parts of the Shire quite a few of the more traditional pastoral 'tanks' were constructed. These are excavations (shallow in the case of Melton), rectangular or round in shape, usually on drainage-lines (before they become gullies) with excavated earth used to raise several sides. In many parts care had to be taken to line the tank with clays, but water-tightness was less of a problem in Melton. The ideal was to provide a tank to water stock within each paddock. As was likely the case with the Clarke dams, shallow topsoil was probably scooped-up with the aid of horses or bullocks. ⁷³⁸

⁷³⁷ Peel, *op cit*, pp.108-109; also Brown, PL (ed), *The Narrative of George Russell of Golf Hill* (OUP, London, 1935), pp.373-374

⁷³⁸ In early days pastoral tanks were scooped out manually, with the aid of a plough and wheelbarrow. This was superseded by use of horses, and bullocks for very large tanks such as were built by the

The excavation of large 'tanks' only began to come into general use in Australia in the 1870s. Where the Werribee River was unable to be used, the massive *Eynesbury* property, (20,000 acres in 1910) relied on 'surface tanks':- 'it has been found practical to scoop excavations in spots free from stone, and the soil in such places has proved to hold water without loss through soakage.' At the same time on Nerowie, another Staughton pastoral property (Parwan Road), it was noted that:-

'Nerowie is not favoured by a good natural water supply, and the requirements of stock in that respect are met with tanks which have been excavated in each of the paddocks. As there is a stiff clay below the vocanic surface soil, no difficulty is experienced in getting holes to hold water.'

While the 'Melton district is sometimes afflicted with sharp spells of drought', Mr Staughton had found the 'most effective means for guarding against this has been found to be deep tanks if kept clean.'⁷⁴¹

By the late 1880s and 1890s another source of stock water - windmills pumping groundwater – were becoming widespread in rural areas. ⁷⁴²

A 1916 map marks 'waterholes' in the Shire. This Most of these are shown on property road boundaries, especially on main roads (eg, Western Highway, Melton Highway, Melton-Gisborne Road). Some may have been in the road reservations. While little is known of them at present, some, such as 'Greives water hole' on Ferris Road, and the dam near the bend on Blackhill Road (near Burns Lane) were known in their localities and used as public watering holes for stock. Others, such as the dam on the small bend on Ryans Road, may also have fitted into this category.

Reclaiming Swamps

The early 'Footscray' road to Melton picked its way through the swampy plains in the Rockbank area. These apparently delayed the Crown sale of the area until the 1860s. Similarly the original road passed avoided the west of Melton, which was swampy as well as heavily forested.

The reclaiming of swamps at the Clarkes' *Rockbank*, or *Deanside*, estate is said to have had both an economic and safety component, having been initially prompted by a drowning on the property. Presumably the dam was a part of these works, but no evidence was observed of the channels that are said to have been a part of the Clarke drainage scheme.

Clarkes. Afterwards there was debate about the economy of using steam powered ploughs and scoops, but these never seem to have been extensively used. (Cannon, Michael, *Life in the Country: Australia in the Victorian Age:* 2 [Nelson, West Melbourne, 1978], p.221; also A Pepys Wood, 'Tanks and Wells of New South Wales, Water Supply and Irrigation', in *Journal of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, Vol.17, 1883, pp.149-189.)

Hughes, Trueman, Ludlow, 'Wells and Underground Tanks', prepared for the Heritage Council of NSW (nd), pp.25-28; also Albrecht, CE, *Measurments and Drawings of Tanks and Dams*, Melbourne, Arnell & Jackson, [1885?]

Arnell & Jackson, [1885?]
⁷⁴⁰ 'The Eynesbury Estate', in *The Pastoral Homes of Australia: Vol.1 Victoria* (The Pastoral Review, 1910), p.10

⁷⁴¹ 'Brooklyn and Nerowie Estates', in Pastoral Homes of Autralia, *op cit*, pp.221, 228

Hughes et al, op cit, pp.68-70; Pepys Wood, op cit

⁷⁴³ Army Ordnance Map, 1916 (Sunbury)

⁷⁴⁴ Mrs Edna Barrie, personal conversation, 30/5/2002

⁷⁴⁵ Mrs B Foard, personal conversation, 11/1/2006 (citing John Beaty)

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Anders Hjorth, apparently a sober man, claimed that he and another saw a strange animal 'with a round stubby, black head ...' travelling about Keating's Swamp when it was overflowing in 1863. 'Some said it must have been a Bunyip' he said. 746

Other swamps in the vicinity of Rockbank were cut and filled when the railway was built in the 1880s. Reclamation continues in the area of Keating's swamp. These swamp remnants may be of historical or social significance to the Shire.

Recreation

From never having had enough water, in the early 1960s Melton was playing with it. The 1962 directory noted that: 'Melton weir on Werribee river, becoming popular resort for speedboat and water ski sports.'747

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⁷⁴⁶ Hjorth, *op cit*. It is not known whether such 'sightings' became part of local folklore. [John Batman was also intrigued by some strange animal's bones that he found near a stream, probably around Lara, in 1835.] ⁷⁴⁷ *ibid*, 1962

CHAPTER TEN: DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIONS: RADIO AND AVIATION

INTRODUCTION

Aviation and radio were the marvels of the early twentieth century. Isolated Australia, in its struggle against the tyranny of distance, was in the vanguard of many pioneering achievements in long-distance international aviation and radio. Melbourne's western and north-western plains facilitated communications of all sorts, and quickly became a centre for these emerging communications technologies in Australia. They provided the setting for pioneering flights; establishment of civil and military airports; and early broad and beam radio transmission and reception, both for civil and defence purposes. The Shire of Melton played a significant part in these developments.

RADIO

The Rockbank Beam Wireless Station

Historian Geoffrey Blainey claims that the opening of a direct beam wireless (at Rockbank and Ballan) which sent 'radiograms swiftly and cheaply between Australia and both sides of the Atlantic', and the subsequent opening of wireless telephone links between Australia and England, 'snatched away' some of the excitement generated by the contemporary pioneering feats of international air travel. Another prominent historian also reminds us of how exciting the beginnings of 'wireless' were, both to amateur experimenters and 'listeners-in', for whom it was 'just as remarkable as powered flight, and more mysterious'. Radio offered a prospect of the 'antipodes united.'⁷⁴⁹ For many in the pioneering decades of the 1920s and 30s, radio also represented a hope of strengthening the bonds of Empire, helping nations to communicate, and bringing the world closer together. In isolated Australia the Beam Wireless was regarded as the communications miracle of its age.

Telegraph cable technology had given the world its first international communications system, and Australia had been connected to Europe via submarine cables through Darwin in 1872. After a period of experimentation, by c.1910 the new technology of radio, or wireless as it was then known, had made a significant contribution to communications, primarily in the form of wireless telegraphy between coastal stations and ships at sea. Although 'the Marconi Co' (Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Company Ltd, situated at Chelmsford, Essex) had installed demonstration transmitting and receiving equipment at Queenscliff (Victoria) and Devonport (Tasmania) in 1905, this successful Bass Strait communication did not persuade the Government to approve or purchase the equipment. But by 1914 there were 19 coastal wireless telegraphy stations established around Australia providing communications with shipping, making an obviously important contribution to maritime safety.

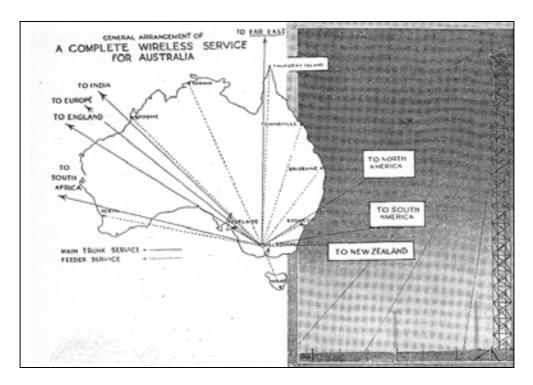
Long distance radio telegraphy however took considerably longer. ET Fisk and Amalgamated Wireless (Australasia) Ltd in Australia had participated in the technical development of this scheme: Australia's distance and technical competence were critical in the inter-continental experiments conducted between Fisk and Nobel Prize winner Guglielmo Marconi, which established the suitability and economy of short-waves for long distance transmission. High-frequency short-wave transmission (combined with beam aerials) subsequently formed the operating system of the Imperial Wireless Service. Although Marconi in England and Fisk in

⁷⁴⁸ Blainey, G, *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History* (revised edition, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1988), pp.300.

⁷⁴⁹ Inglis, KS, 'The Beginnings of Radio in Australia', Stirling Memorial Lecture 1980.

Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, *Technology in Australia 1788-1988*, (Melbourne 1988, On-line 2000), p.536

Australia had set a new international telegraphy benchmark in a successful London-Sydney wireless communication in 1918, it was not until the opening of the service from Ballan (transmitting) and Rockbank (receiving) stations in 1927 that the longest 'wireless' span in the world was bridged by a regular commercial telegraph service. These new possibilities into long distance communication had emerged as a result of experimentation by Marconi with short wavelengths, combined with the development by Franklin of directional 'beam' aerials.⁷⁵¹



In 1927 the proposed 'General Arrangement of a Complete Wireless Service for Australia' focuses on the Ballan and Rockbank Beam Stations. (*Radio*, May 1927, p.18) A 1939 map reveals that the shorter of these overseas links were in fact operated from different capitals, primarily Sydney, with only the longer distance (North America and England) communications conducted through 'Fiskville' (Ballan) and Rockbank. (*Radio Waves*, July 2004, p.8)

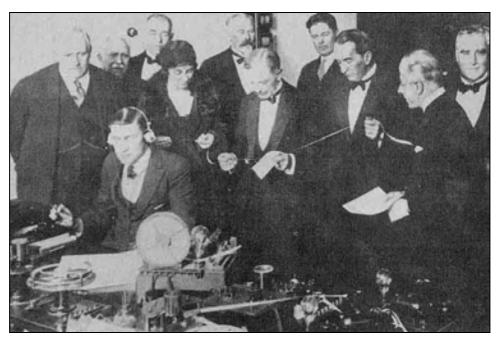
In contrast to 'broadcasting', which had made its first Australian appearance in Sydney in 1923, the 'beam' wireless concentrated and then directed narrow signals to equivalent facilities on the other side of the world (where the signals were transcribed onto tapes and then into the written word by similar high speed machinery as had been used by cable systems). Although the spread of broadcasting was one of the most famous achievements of the age, telegraphy 'via beam' was probably a larger field of radio application by the late 1920s. ⁷⁵²

Rockbank was the receiving station of the Australian 'Imperial Wireless Service' (known popularly as 'the Beam' service), which provided the nation's first radio communication with Britain and North America, first through telegraphy (1927), and then facsimile 'picturegram' services (1934). Both services were the longest in the world. (Rockbank-Ballan may also have provided Australia's first wireless telephone link with Britain in 1930, the first such connection between Britain and a Dominion.)

⁷⁵¹ Radio Review of Australia, January 1937, p.22

⁷⁵² The article by CF Elwell, 'Radio: Its Past, Present and Future', in *Radio*, 13th October 1926, provides a very good overview of the development of radio to that date.

The 'radio-picturegram' service, ⁷⁵³ said the *Age* newspaper, was 'the latest remarkable advance that has been made in the field of wireless achievement'. The first scanned 'radio picture' received from England at Rockbank was the photograph of dashing young Adelaide aviator Jimmy Melrose beside his plane preparing for the Centenary Air Race in 1934. The first colour picture was transmitted from London in 1946. The picturegrams were used mainly by Australian newspapers.



The Melbourne Operating Room at the official opening of the Beam Wireless Service, 1927. Prime Minister SM Bruce examines the tape, observed (on the right) by ET Fisk, and RG Menzies. (The Beamers: A Photographic History of the Beam Radio Services 1927-1969, p.7)

The nationally significant Rockbank station is also significant for its association with AWA which was the second largest radio company in the British Empire, and an Australian icon through its provision of broadcasting transmission equipment, and more popularly its design and manufacture of household radio (and later, television) receivers. In particular the establishment of the Beam service is associated with AWA's Sir Ernest Thomas Fisk, the outstanding figure in the early history of radio in Australia. Fisk's unswerving vision of a direct 'one hop' radio connection between Australia and Britain (and the rest of the Empire) persuaded Australian Prime Minister WM Hughes, whose strong advocacy in turn persuaded the whole British Empire to adopt this system rather than the dominion relay system favoured by the British government. The successful Australian Beam Station of 1927 – 'epoch making in the records of Wireless' – represented the 'consummation' of Fisk's scheme. For Fisk, the creator

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⁷⁵³ Ian McLean, 'Rockbank, Fiskville and the Beam Wireless, Part 2', in HRSA *Radio Waves*, July 2004, pp.12-13; also Caslon, Australasian Telecommunications Profile: History (Caslon) www.caslon.com.au/austelecomsprofile1 htm

⁷⁵⁴ The Age, 17th October 1934, enthused that 'the new photogram service brings an entirely new and speedy facility to the Australian businessman, saving at least a month in the delivery of rush documents and pictures, and enables transactions in which photographs, drawings, plans or signatures are concerned to be carried out with telegraphic despatch' ... fashions, music, cheques, balance sheets, legal documents, contracts, birth and marriage certificates could all be transmitted without delay. The story was reproduced in *The Age: 150 years since 1854*

⁷⁵⁵ *ibid*. Melrose later lost his life in a plane crash at Melton. It might be said that he (somewhat tragically) symbolises the significance of the Keilor-Werribee plains in the Australian history of the two great early twentieth century technological developments:- aviation and radio.

of AWA, 'national interest' was paramount, and the success of the Rockbank and Ballan Beam Wireless service represented his greatest achievement. ⁷⁵⁶

By 1946 AWA believed its efficient and inexpensive method of communication had saved the country hundreds of thousands of pounds. The Beam Wireless service, seen by some as a reckless gamble, 'had proved itself, beyond doubt, as the communications miracle of the age', 757

From 1947 until 1969 the facility was operated by AWA's successor in this field, the government-run Overseas Telecommunications Commission. The OTC also played a leading role in communications research and development, particularly in relation to rhombic aerials. In October 1957 signals from the first man-made satellite in orbit were detected by Rockbank and Bringelly. In 1964 OTC was one of 11 founding members of the International Telecommunications Satellite consortium whose aim was to develop a global communications satellite system. In 1966 it opened Australia's first satellite earth station at Carnarvon in Western Australia, followed by others in Moree (1968), and Ceduna (1969). Computers, coaxial cable and satellites were superseding Beam Wireless, and Rockbank was closed in May 1969. It had been jointly used by the military for some time prior to its closure. 758



Residential Quarters and Gardens, Rockbank Beam Wireless Receiving Station (David Moloney)

All the mighty masts and arrays, and the radio reception building at Rockbank have been removed, but the living quarters remain intact. The buildings and setting are of State architectural significance for their outstanding Mission Revival and Bungalow cottage styles, in an archetypal interwar garden setting. The landscaped enclave is an architectural surprise in the generally featureless Greigs Road landscape. An almost identical complex, called 'Fiskville', survives at Ballan.

David Moloney

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⁷⁵⁶ Larkin, FW, 'The Man Fisk', in *Radio*, 15th August 1927, pp.10-11, 74

⁷⁵⁷ Miller, M, The Beamers: A Photographic History of the Beam Radio Service 1927 - 1969

⁽Australian and Overseas Telecommunications Corporation Ltd, 1992), p.12 ⁷⁵⁸ Bob Padula, 'A Visit to the Ballan Wireless Station', *APC News*, 17/4/2002

In 1959 scenes for Stanley Kramer Production film 'On the Beach' had been shot at the Rockbank Beam Wireless station. 759 A visit to the Mt Cottrell Road 'Beam Wireless Station' was part of the 'Back to Melton Official Souvenir Program' of February 1929, so it dates from the very early days of radio.⁷⁶⁰

The Diggers Rest and Rockbank Army Radio Stations

During the Second World War major radio masts appeared at Rockbank (Army Receiving Station) and Diggers Rest (Army Transmitting Station). The Americans established these stations, or bases, which were intimately associated with events of great historical importance to Australia.

The surprise Japanese air-raid on Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941 had created a new Pacific arena in the Second World War, and brought the United States into the conflict. In the following months the Japanese conducted lightening advances throughout South East Asia including, on 15th February 1942, the defeat of the British fortress at Singapore. Four days later the Japanese carried out the first of their bombing raids on Darwin.

This crisis impelled Prime Minister Curtin to make his historic declaration that Australia's future would now depend more on its relationship with the USA than with Britain. In March 1942 US General Douglas MacArthur arrived in Australia to co-ordinate the war against the Japanese. Australia's war effort was being controlled from Melbourne's Victoria Barracks on St Kilda Road, and MacArthur also established his headquarters in Melbourne. These were Australia's dark days, of slit trenches in parks, concrete air raid shelters and city 'brown-outs'. In May 1942 Japanese midget submarines attacked Sydney Harbour.

International radio communications were vital to the establishment of US headquarters in Melbourne. By April 1942 survey works for radio stations at Diggers Rest (transmitting) and Rockbank (receiving) stations had been completed. 761 In April four rhombic aerials, mounted on sixteen 100 foot masts, were commissioned at both Diggers Rest and Rockbank to connect US command with 'Panama, Pearce, Washington, and Bombay (India)'. 762

After conquests throughout Asia - in China, the Philippines and Singapore - the focus of the Japanese by late 1942 was the invasion of New Guinea, where they were met by Australian and US forces. Two key naval battles dealt a major blow to the Japanese offensive. The Battle of the Coral Sea in May, while inflicting equal damage on both sides, repelled the Japanese naval assault on Port Moresby. In the Battle of Midway in June, the US and allied forces inflicted a major defeat on Japan.

While the New Guinea campaign continued throughout 1942, these naval battles represented a turning point in the war. MacArthur pronounced that the allied forces recapture of Sanananda in northern New Guinea in January 1943 signalled the start of the Japanese collapse.

 $^{760}\,\mathrm{MDHS}$

⁷⁵⁹ Miller *op cit*, p.12

⁷⁶¹ *ibid*, Item 205/16 ⁷⁶² *ibid*, Item W405/259



Diggers Rest, 1945. 'Exterior view of the new Igloo Building housing land headquarters signals. Built 1944, the exterior of the building remains intact today. (Australian War Memorial)

US forces were now on a northward offensive, on an island hopping campaign in the central and south Pacific. Their infrastructure, including radio communication facilities, moved north with them. The Diggers Rest and Rockbank stations were no longer of use to the US military command. On 12th January 1943 an Australian War Cabinet agendum advised that the Australian Army had recently taken possession of the Diggers Rest and Rockbank radio stations, and their cable connections to the city communications centres. ⁷⁶³

The rhombic aerials inherited by the Australians from the Americans had been directed at Darwin (and 'Chunking'), Townsville and Port Moresby, London, San Francisco and Noumea. By the war's end the stations were the Australian Army's link with London and other Commonwealth centres in South-East Asia (Delhi, Kandy, Singapore and Welllington), and Rabaul in New Guinea. In the immediate post-war period, Diggers Rest and Rockbank were also the lynch-pins of communication between the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces, handling all UK, NZ and Indian traffic between Melbourne and Japan (Kure).

In the late 1940s into the 1960s the Diggers Rest and Rockbank stations were 'the radio transmitting and receiving centres of the Australian Relay Station of the Empire Army Wireless Chain and the AMF communication system.' The stations were the hub of Australia's defence communications strategy. Their major communications tasks were associated with the:-

'British Commonwealth Army Wireless Chain (known as the AWC) which ... links the War Office and UK Defence Ministry with Commonwealth countries and overseas theatres, namely Canada, East and West Africa, Ceylon, Singapore, Middle East, Japan, New Zealand and Australia.'765

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⁷⁶³ *ibid*, Minute Paper, 12/1/1943 (458/45)

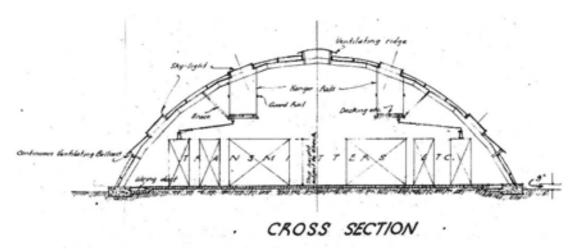
⁷⁶⁴ NAA, Series MP742/1, Item 217/1/226, 11/8/1949

⁷⁶⁵ ihid



Diggers Rest, 1943. Long shot view of transmission line and terminating resistance of the Rhombie Aerial used for transmitting on the Melbourne - London wireless/telegraphy channel by the Land Headquarters Heavy Wireless Group. (Australian War Memorial)

The stations also maintained communication with other Australian Army centres (including Long Range Weapons Experimental Establishment). They also operated communication with Honolulu on behalf of the Department of Civil Aviation. They then played a critical role in international radio coverage of the Melbourne Olympic Games in 1956.



Cross Section of the Diggers Rest Transmitting Station, June 1944. (National Australian Archives)

A modernisation plan of the AWC provided a major period of construction works at Diggers Rest and Rockbank from the late 1950s and into the 1960s. The bases are now decommissioned, and the tall masts and arrays, once a major landscape feature of the Rockbank and Diggers Rest areas, have now all been dismantled. All that remains are huge concrete blocks (aerial or stay foundations), now bulldozed into piles at Diggers Rest, some empty

complexes of c.1960s brick buildings, and, at Diggers Rest, a large bow steel roofed structure, with the appearance of an oversize Nissen Hut. This former radio transmission building is not, as is believed by some locals, to have been built by the Americans. Army documents show that it was built by and for the Australian Army, probably in late 1944.⁷⁶⁶ It is significant as probably the only significant Second World War building on the Diggers Rest and Rockbank sites, which are associated with Australia's 1942 crisis and the coming of the Americans and Supreme Commander General Douglas MacArthur. It is also significant as the Australian Army's international radio communication facilities during the War, for their co-ordination of communication with all British occupying forces in Japan, and the post-war period Empire Army Wireless Chain.



Signalman McDonough and signalman Aspinell working in the Land Headquarters Receiving Station at Rockbank, 1945.

Other Facilities in the Plains Region

Other stations in the area included the small Spanish Mission style building which is all that remains of the AWA's Melbourne 'Radio Centre' transmitter in Radio Street Maidstone. This was co-located with Melbourne's first broadcaster 3LO, and AWA's high frequency Beam 'feeder' service transmitters to Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane, and the coastal service transmitter. The later 1940s-50s 3LO transmitters (acquired by the government during WW2) are intact with a deco building near Sydenham.

Defence related radio installations included the Army's reception station at Rockbank, and its transmission station at Diggers Rest; the Airforce's major radio station at Werribee, where a large receiving station, with a complex of 31 antennas was established⁷⁶⁹; and the former secret wartime Dutch East Indies radio station at Craigieburn (later taken over by the Civil Aviation Authority).⁷⁷⁰

An early Australian Army document sheds some light on the prevalence of these major radio facilities in the area:-

 $^{^{766}}$ Drawing 'Diggers Rest Proposed Transmitter Building' (14/6/1944); also Item A259/18/442 (12/9/1944)

⁷⁶⁷ AWA, 1930, op cit.

⁷⁶⁸ Olwen Ford, Gary Vines, 'Brimbank Heritage Study'; Bob Padua, 'Beam Wireless Anniversary', in APC (Moorabbin and District Radio Club Weekly), c.2002

⁷⁶⁹ Technology in Australia, op cit, p.543

⁷⁷⁰ David Moloney, 'City of Hume Heritage Study Review 2004'.

'The Diggers Rest and Rockbank sites were originally selected by the US Signal Corps in conjunction with the RAAF and PMG Research Section after a most exhaustive survey of the whole of Victoria for suitable areas for the installation of short wave transmitting and receiving centres which could provide communication on a world wide basis.

The installation at Rockbank prior to the War of the Australian terminal of the commercial Beam Wireless network operated by Amalgamated Wireless was also due to the excellent noise free 771 conditions that exist for the reception of long range wireless signals in that locality.

It is very necessary in the establishment of Service Wireless Centres to select sites which provide good alternative routes for remote control keying circuits. The Diggers Rest area has an excellent line-of-sight path from the City of Melbourne, and this has enabled the installation of a number of VHF radio links, between *Grosvenor* Signal Office [the Queens Road mansion that now served as the Army communications centre] and Diggers Rest, which are capable of maintaining essential channels in the event of a major line circuit failure.

Diggers Rest site is ideal for transmission purposes as it is entirely free from screening by mountains or trees in any direction, and in addition, both sites, being flat, are ideal for ease of erection of large antenna arrays.'772

Previously, Australian Army radio communication had been through radio stations at Coldstream and Park Orchards (Mitcham), but despite their relative altitude, these sites suffered from lack of suitable terrain: large areas of flat space upon which to build rhombic aerials.

AVIATION

Just over 100 years ago the world realised a dream when the Wright brothers took to the skies. The breakthrough was to become especially important in Australia, where vast distances impeded development.

Victoria, particularly the Fisherman's Bend (Port Melbourne) and Melbourne's western plains areas, played a leading role in this development. Victoria was the hub of early Australian aviation: the origin of many 'first' flights; the birthplace of the RAAF; and the headquarters of major domestic civil aviation companies (Holyman's) ANA, Ansett and TAA. The first Australian designed and built aircraft flew at Mia Mia in country Victoria, and Fisherman's Bend became the centre of government and commercial aircraft research, design and manufacture. It is notable that the grand event of Victoria's 1934 Centenary celebration was the pioneering London to Melbourne Air Race. And also that Australia's first locally designed mass produced aircraft were built in Melbourne ten years before Australia's first locally designed car.

Much of the western plains aviation heritage remains:- the Point Cook airbase (with claim to being the world's oldest surviving airfield), parts of the Laverton airbase and satellite bases at Little River and Lara, Essendon Airport, the RAAF Museum at Point Cook, Werribee's historic RAAF hangars with their the B24 Liberator Bomber project, and the Avalon Airshow. Melbourne's western plains are becoming a recognised aviation tourism zone.

^{771 &#}x27;Noise' means electrical or weather related interference in radio.

National Australian Archives, Series MP927/1, Item A259/18/442: Feb 1946: AMF Minute Paper, 'Sigs 5099'

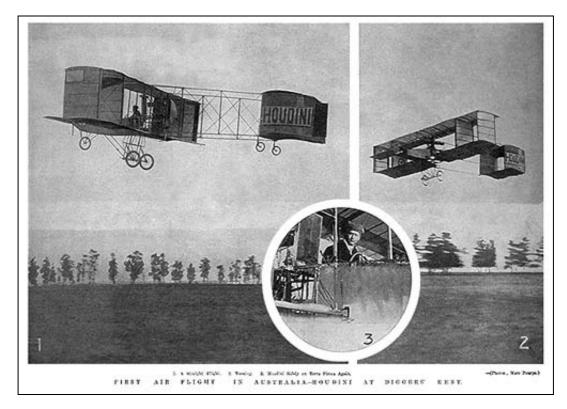
Melton Shire too has several places of aviation note that would merit inclusion in any aviation heritage tour.

HOUDINI'S FLIGHT

Early in the morning of 18th March 1910 Ehrich Weiss (better known as famous escapologist Harry Houdini) flew his Voisin aircraft from a paddock at Diggers Rest. Houdini took off and landed three times and on one flight made a three kilometre controlled ciruit of the paddock. He reached an altitude of 30 metres, and his flights lasted from one minute to three minutes 30 seconds. The *Argus* described it as follows:-

'The third flight lasted 3 1/2 minutes and was unmarred by any fault. Houdini swept boldly away from the flying field, confident of his control of the plane, and passing over rocky rises and stone fences, described a great circle, which was, at the lowest estimate, well over two miles. The machine, in rounding curves, leaned over, as one sees a seagull lean sideways to the wind, but the aviator felt that he was no longer a "fledgling", and, the curve negotiated, straightened the plane with a turn of the wheel. The descent was faultless, and the plane came to rest within 20 feet of the starting point, where the little knot of witnesses were standing.'774

"I am perfectly satisfied," remarked Houdini afterwards, "I can now fly, and my machine is a perfect piece of mechanism. I never have enjoyed any experience so much. With just a little more practice I will be able to fly over Melbourne, and I expect to astonish the people by doing so one day." 775



Houdini's Diggers Rest flight in the Australian daily press.

⁷⁷⁴ The *Argus*, 19/3/1910

⁷⁷³ Starr, *op cit*, p.250

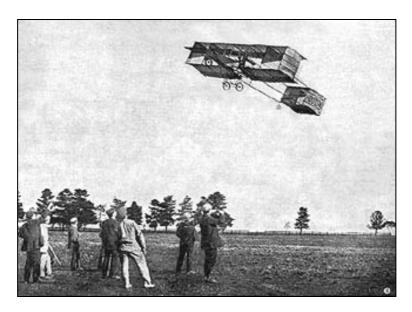
⁷⁷⁵ The *Age*, 19/3/1910

This is regarded as the first powered and controlled aircraft flight in Australia.⁷⁷⁶ The claim has been disputed, as in Adelaide on the previous day, Fred Custance had stayed aloft for five minutes and 25 seconds. However, as the flight only attained a few feet height off the ground it is questioned whether the Custance flight was indeed 'controlled'.⁷⁷⁷

Houdini may have beaten Custance into the air but for the caution of Brassac, his French mechanic. Brassac cursed Australia from dawn to dusk as 'This country of great winds'. His fear of the wind stemmed from an accident a week earlier. Ralph C Banks (owner of the Melbourne Motor Garage) had announced that he was going to beat Houdini into the air. On 10th March he took off - also at Diggers Rest - in his imported Wright biplane. He made several short flights. But the exposed Keilor plains defeated him. On his final flight he was scarcely airborne when a gust of wind hurled the plane to the ground. He was uninjured, but the plane was completely wrecked. Mr Banks later heartily congratulated Mr Houdini on his success. ⁷⁷⁸

One of the Houdini's Diggers Rest witnesses was the soon to be famous aviator Harry Hawker. After his Diggers Rest triumph, Houdini later made two flights in Sydney at Rosehill Racecourse, 18th April 1910.

A memorial has been erected near the paddock where the Houdini flight took place, and another at the Diggers Rest township.



Houdini's flight at Diggers Rest

MOUNT KOROROIT FARM

After Banks' attempt and Houdini's feat the Diggers Rest area presumably became known for its aviation associations. As well, at nearby Mount Kororoit, evidence survives of at least one major early aviation gathering on the Mount Kororoit Farm property in the form of an early photograph, dated 1913-14, entitled the 'Austin Equitorial Balance Aeroplane camp' on 'John

⁷⁷⁸ Starr, *op cit*, pp.250-251; The *Age*, 19/3/1910

⁷⁷⁶ Eg, Mitchell Library website: 'Aviation in Australia'

⁷⁷⁷ Starr, *op cit*, p.250

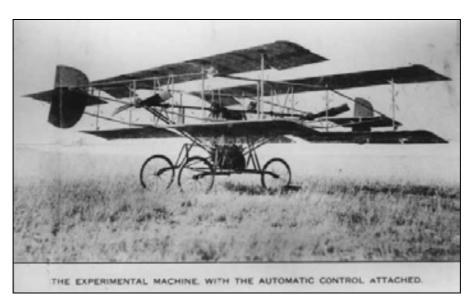
Moylan's Mt Kororoit estate'. This event was probably associated with a local historical record that a plane flew off the top of Mt Kororoit in 1913.

The photographs show a primitive bi-plane set in a paddock in front of a row of substantial tents (which may have been for aircraft). Captions of the photographs refer to 'The Experimental Machine with the Automatic Control Attached', and 'Austin Equatorial Balance Aeroplane camp and aeroplane 1913-1914'. Moylan appears to have been an active figure in the early development of Victorian aviation.



(J.T. Collins Collection, La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria)

John Moylan's 'Mt. Kororoit' estate, Melton, 1913-1914. (Houdini's plane had been housed in a similar tent a few years before.)



John Moylan's 'Mt. Kororoit' estate, Melton, 1913-1914. (J.T. Collins Collection, La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria)

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 $^{^{779} \} Australian \ National \ Library \ `Picture \ Australia', \ State \ Library \ of \ Victoria \ photograph \ 1093259.$

CJ (JIMMY) MELROSE

Local history records that 'The appearance of an aeroplane in 1917 caused quite a stir.'⁷⁸⁰ By 1936, with aerodromes nearby, an overhead aircraft would have been a much less remarkable sight in Melton. On 5th July 1936 one such flight ended tragically at Melton South. Its pilot, then famous Australian aviator Jimmy Melrose, and his charter flight passenger, were killed.

Melrose was an Adelaide aviator who had gained international fame for his flying records, and popularity for his modesty and youthful good looks. In his short career he had broken 'Round Australia', and Australia to England flying records.

He then partook in the 1934 MacRobertson 'Great Race' from London to Melbourne, a part of Victoria's Centenary celebrations. In October 1934 newspapers in Sydney and Melbourne eagerly sought a photograph of the young Australian as he prepared for the race. His photograph became the first digital image to arrive in Australia (received at AWA's Rockbank Beam Wireless Receiving Station), preceding the aviator by 223 hours.

Only 11 of the original 64 entries finished the gruelling 18,000 kilometre race. Flying a DH 80A Puss Moth named *My Hildegarde* (after his mother) Melrose landed at Laverton ten days later, after 120 hours flying time, claiming second place in the handicap division. He was '...the only Australian to finish, the youngest aviator, and the only pilot to fly the world's greatest race unaccompanied.' Research



Jimmy Melrose preparing for the 'Great Race', October 1934.

⁷⁸⁰ Macdonald, op cit, p.14

Winner of the handicap section, and second fastest with an air time of 81 hours 10 minutes, was the Dutch airliner *Uiver* (Stork). With four crew and three passengers, the Douglas DC2 entered by KLM airlines proved that passenger air travel could be comfortable, safe and reliable.

⁷⁸² Gunton, E, *The Jimmy Melrose Story: Australia's Youngest Air Ace*, (self-published, 1990), p.53

Melrose's flying feats continued in Oceania, Canada, the United Kingdom, Sweden and the Subcontinent. His final prominent public role was taking part in the search for Kingsford Smith.

At South Melton, residents saw a plane emerge from low cloud above the railway station. Less than 150 metres up, the engine laboured, and after a loud roar the plane began to go into a spin and then burst into fragments in the air. When Melrose was identified there was widespread public mourning, and international tributes. Australia's Prime Minister Mr Lyons regretted the death of 'yet another of Australia's great airmen...a chivalrous knight of the air, whom it can ill afford to lose.'784

The rock that was split when the plane hit was made into a memorial cairn by the 'Melrose Essendon Rangers' in 1936. Forty years later this rock cairn had deteriorated, and another was erected on the same site by EG Barrie and Ray Radford. This cairn and plaque remain to mark the site of the crash, on the banks of a gully south of Brooklyn Road, near the railway line. A cairn has also been erected in the Jimmy Melrose Memorial Reserve in Springbank Way, Brookfield. A rock monument to Jimmy Melrose can be found at the rear of the Melton Visitor Information Centre.



Poster: 'World's Greatest Air Race' (1934)

HIGH STREET CRASH

Melton was the scene of another aviation tragedy a few years later. A plane crashed in the centre of the town killing the plane's two occupants. It was extremely fortunate that no buildings were hit, and that no locals were killed.

⁷⁸⁴ *ibid*, p.121

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⁷⁸³ *ibid*, p.120

The accident occurred on December 2nd 1949, not long after the aircraft had taken off. Details of the accident vary. One version had it that the plane struck the high tension wires just near the Mechanics Hall, skirted over the tennis court at the rear of the hall, and crashed on the roadway near the school residence, bursting into flame. Another was that the plane, a Tiger Moth, had first hit the flag pole on the Mechanics Institute. ⁷⁸⁶

It is not known from where the aircraft had taken off. By 1969 at least one small private airfield - the 'Fogarty Field' aerodrome, Coburn's Road Toolern Vale - was in operation. It provided charter and joy flights, and pilot instruction. ⁷⁸⁷

World War Two

Again, due to its proximity to existing airfields and flat terrain, the area featured in World War Two airforce preparation. Part of the Eynesbury estate was used as an aircraft bombing range. And prior to the wartime turning point of the Battle of the Coral Sea, four Lockheed Bombers landed in Robinsons flat '100 acre' paddock near Djerriwarrh Creek, to be concealed in the abutting Mallee Forest. The pilots of the submarine patrol planes would then return in one plane to their base at Laverton. Armed groundstaff would camp in the forest. The

⁷⁸⁵ Macdonald, op cit, p.17

⁷⁸⁶ G Minns, pers. conv.

⁷⁸⁷ Toolern Vale State School Centenary History 1869-1969 (Toolern Vale State School, 1969), p.38

⁷⁸⁸ Ray Radford, John Phillips, pers. conv.

⁷⁸⁹ Jeff Robinson, pers. conv.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: SATELLITE CITY

The post-war increase in motor-car ownership and immigration, together with the rise of the town planning profession in the 1960s were the background to Melton being declared Victoria's first 'Satellite City'. This was a watershed in the history of the Shire.

Despite the setbacks and periods of growth which had affected farming, from the late 1850s until the late 1950s Melton Shire had been a relatively stable rural community. From 1880 to 1955 its population had fluctuated between about 1000 and 1500. In 1962 the Shire's population rose to 1800, and doubled to 3600 in the six years to 1968. In the next ten years the population more than quadrupled to $16,500.^{790}$ By this time projections of 100,000 and 250,000 were made for the Shire population. In the early 1980s the official Shire crest was changed from representations of a wheat sheaf, cow, sheep and hills, to the logo 'Melton the good move', and then 'Melton the good life'.



The Melton Civic Centre soon after its opening (M&DHS)

The first small residential subdivision occurred from the late 1950s: at Station Road, between Barries Road and High Street. The first large estate was on the north side of the Highway: about 20 streets and crescents named mostly after birds - Quail Crescent, Bittern, Plover etc streets. The huge Westmelton estate, developed in stages, was also the first estate in the 'modern' style, with streets laid out on a curved plan, and with a road hierarchy in which 'Ways', 'Drives', 'Circuits' etc provided access to dozens of *culs de sac*.

The 'Satellite City' status accorded Melton in 1974 was a product of the rise of the town planning profession in the 1960s. To the term 'decentralisation,' which had emanated from the old concern at the 'drift to the cities', the phrase 'balanced growth' had been added after

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⁷⁹⁰ Victorian Municipal Directories, 1880 - 1992

the Second World War. It had originated as an argument for the development of Australia's underpopulated regions, and was taken up by competing provincial cities seeking special concessions and incentives to promote regional growth. The rise of the town planning profession in the 1960s applied these same concepts to its concern for urban 'quality of life' issues: large cities and unrelieved urban sprawl were seen as too congested, uncongenial, and economically inefficient.

In 1968 RJ Hamer, Minister for Local Government, in a statement to a planning conference, remarked on the 'lopsided pattern of the growth of the Metropolis'. He claimed that 'the balance can be restored' by 'a deliberate policy' in relation to transport, water, power and other services 'in developing areas'. Noting that improvements such as the Tullamarine Freeway and Westgate bridge would increase access to the west, he announced that, to:

"...assist further this growth, the Metropolitan Planning Authority will be asked to study the practicability of establishing satellite towns in the areas of Melton, Sunbury and Whittlesea". ⁷⁹¹

This was probably the first Victorian government reference to what was then an exciting new concept. While Hamer said that it was about balancing industrial, commercial and residential development rather than creating 'Government towns', it nevertheless signalled a new proactive role for State government in shaping urban development.



Real Estate agents Jack Butler and Phil Hickmont at the official opening of the Melton Industrial Park.

In late 1974 road signs advised travellers that Melton was 'Victoria's first Satellite City'. The State promised to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in the project. In January 1975 an Interim Co-ordinating Committee appointed numerous consultants to report on the proposal. In September 1978 it was replaced with the Melton and Sunbury Management Committee. The Hamer government's promise of \$12.5 million for Melton was upheld by the subsequent Cain government.

Whatever of the state's planners' visions of satellite cities, not much rhetoric about a new way of life filtered through to local government in Melton. There were occasional reference to

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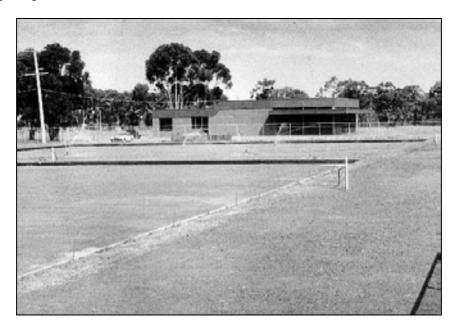
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⁷⁹¹ Paper submitted by the Shire President, Cr AE Missen, to the '72 Seminar, 'The Deprived West' (Shire of Melton), p.5

'pollution-free' living in order to deliver the 'good life', but by the early 1970s Melton was Victoria's fastest growing municipality, and Council's main concerns were to tackle the town's drainage problem, develop pre-schools, improve roads, and provide a sewerage system. And it was concerned at the impact on farming of the escalating land values, and on equity issues created by new different planning zones. But Council's focus soon included broad social amenities as well as physical infrastructure.

From the early 1970s a flood of studies emanated from the government planners. By the early 1980s the government and academic literature on Melton was focussing on 'human service' planning, as well as reviews of this landmark in planning history. The new focus on social indicators was not only a response to problems with vandalism in Melton, but to the new national perspectives on 'regional' equity, promoted by the Whitlam Commonwealth government. As 'the deprived west' became a household phrase, the initially wary Shire Melton became a member of the new Western Region Commission, and a beneficiary of Federal funding.

Meanwhile development was proceeding, with 'public buildings, schools – including Catholic schools and colleges – shopping centres, sports centres.'⁷⁹⁶ The Melton Club, opened in a tin shed in 1982, was soon a commodious modern building, with bowling greens, and another centre of social life in the town. The opening of the Industrial Park provided an occasion for official opening and celebration of the town's future.⁷⁹⁷



The Melton Club and Bowling Green (opened 1982): building the new facilities.

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⁷⁹² Eg, Missen, *op cit*; Shire of Melton, 'Submission on Application by Norton Court P/L for MMBW Planning Permit (1973); Shire of Melton, Retiring Presidents Reports, 1973 & 1974

 ⁷⁹³ Eg: Town and Country Planning Board, *Melton and Sunbury Investigation Areas* (Melbourne, 1974); Melton Sunbury Interim Co-ordinating Committee (Vic), *Melton Sunbury Satellite Townships: The First Steps* (Melbourne, 1976).
 ⁷⁹⁴ Eg: Havens, JM, 'Melton and Subury, the Satellite Cities: A Study of Planning In Victoria,

⁷⁹⁴ Eg: Havens, JM, 'Melton and Subury, the Satellite Cities: A Study of Planning In Victoria, Australia. An American Perspective' (University of Melbourne, 1980); Reid, JM 'The Melton Study: A Survey of Recent School Leavers and Employers in the Western Metropolitan Region of Melbourne' (Footscray College of TAFE, 1983)

⁷⁹⁵ Shire of Melton, 'Retiring President's Report, 1973-74' (John S Shugg)

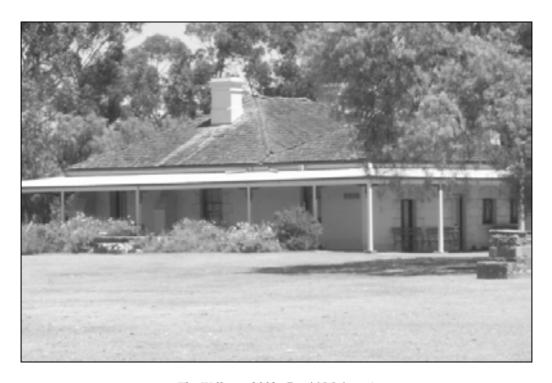
⁷⁹⁶ Lack, Ford, op cit, p.129

⁷⁹⁷ M&DHS photographic collection.

At the same time, many of the Melton township's old buildings were being swept away in the spirit of 'Satellite City' development. But the town's stalwart older generation also realised the need to preserve the Shire's history and heritage. The Melton Historical Society had been formed in 1968, and in 1973 the Council invited the public to a meeting to gauge extent of support for the establishment of a Melton Historic Park based on *The Willows* homestead, which had been purchased by Council. Mayor EW Gillespie subsequently reported on the 'considerable public enthusiasm' for this initiative. The Council spelt out its broader vision in its submission to the Australian Heritage Council:

'Melton is destined to become, by the end of the present century, a city of between 75,000 and 100,000 people. Significant relics of the past, such as 'The Willows', regrettably will be rare in that situation. It is essential that sufficient tangible links with Melton's pioneering days remain to promote in the new community a sense of history and continuity'. 799

The initiative went ahead, and the Willows became the headquarters of the Melton and District Historical Society. With the assistance of the Council the historical society has since relocated a number of other buildings to the park, restored and interpreted the *Willows*, and built sheds to house collections of rural implements, wagons etc, in memory of the earlier era of the Shire's history.



The Willows, 2002 (David Moloney)

However, buildings that could not be removed to the historic park were vulnerable. Despite regrets there seemed to be a resignation regarding the passing of the old. For example, in 1977 Mac's Hotel was demolished after attempts to save it had failed: it was now 'a beautiful

⁷⁹⁸ Shire of Melton Press Release, 19th July 1973. Mrs Edna Barrie, and Mr and Mrs Ed Gillespie appear to have initiated this meeting.

⁷⁹⁹ Shire of Melton, 'Restoration of 'The Willows' (Submission to the Interim Council of the National Estate, August 1975), p.5

modern building ... which will adequately cater for the changing life style of Melton'. 800 There are presently only very few public buildings left in the town; in High Street only the façade of the Mechanics Institute, and the Court House. At the eastern entrance to the town the small bluestone cottage (presently a honey shop) is another lonely survivor.

Another impact of the transformation of old township areas into 'dormitory' commuter suburbs was the impact on the viability of some farms. There had already been an increase in agistment and hobby farms, and a decline in dairy farming. As land values and property rates rose, weed spread, and marauding packs of domestic dogs attacked sheep, many farmers left Melton to move to farms in more distant and traditional rural areas.

Potential Heritage Places

The government vision of a superior living environment in the Melton 'satellite' doubtless energized the explosive growth of the township in the early 1970s, and contributed to the contemporaneous transformation of the whole Shire. But there does not appear to be any specific site that is an obvious monument to this notable planning initiative. The actual Government investment in the town appears to have fallen well short of the amount initially envisaged, and was mainly swallowed up in upgrading physical infrastructure and roadworks.

However, early 1970s places associated with State, and Federal, inspired 'community building' initiatives may be of potential heritage significance, particularly if they have additional social or architectural values. However most are infrastructure works, such as water and sewerage (1979). State 'satellite city' community initiatives included a 'community hall, emergency housing, tree plantings, beautification etc.'⁸⁰¹ The Melton Club was a significant social development of the time. The main monument to the Satellite City initiative would appear to be the building of the Melton Civic Centre / Community Hall on High Street, to replace the hall associated with the Mechanics Institute.

The Whitlam Federal government's Area Improvement Program funding was used by Council to purchase 190 acres of land for the McPherson Park sporting complex; and, under the Australian Assistance Plan it purchased a Station Road dwelling for the Melton Community Resource Centre. General community and town planning 'movement' interest in the satellite city concept resulted in the development of design options for the Melton Recreation Reserve by Melbourne University town planning students, at the initiative of the Melton Lions Club. 802

Under the heading of 'Make Melton More Beautiful', a Melton Council newsletter of 1976 advised new householders (and rural landholders) of their entitlement to native trees or shrubs. Bluegums were prominent among the many trees planted, but they grew so large that many have since had to be removed. Beautification by tree planting was clearly an objective of both the State and Council, and evidence of this would be of interest.

The Willows Historical Park represents the desire to preserve the 'old' Melton, in the face of all the changes.

802 Shire of Melton, 'Retiring President's Report, 1973' (EW Gillespie)

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⁸⁰⁰ Extract from Melton & District Historical Society, Pennyroyal Journal, 1977.

⁸⁰¹ Starr, op cit, p.270

⁸⁰³ Melton Council Newsletter, November 1976

⁸⁰⁴ June Hatch, pers. conv.