

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: BARRAHEAD HOMESTEAD COMPLEX

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Mirranatwa School Road MIRRANATWA

STUDY NUMBER: 318

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

OTHER NAME/S OF PLACE: BARRA HEAD; VICTORIA VALLEY

PRECINCT: outside

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

ALLOTMENT: C/A 73

PARISH: PARISH OF MIRRANATWA

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

CFA 390 F5; VicRoads 559 H8; located on the south side of the Mirranatwa School Road, beside the Mirranatwa hall and former school halfway between Addinsall's Road and Mirranatwa Road

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: State

[no photograph available, access denied and permission refused]

Image Date:

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All the homestead and any surrounding outbuildings, the garden immediately around the house as bounded by the garden fence, and all the land on the pre-emptive right but excluding the residential complex called Yileena.

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: BARRAHEAD HOMESTEAD COMPLEX

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Mirranatwa School Road MIRRANATWA

STUDY NUMBER: 318

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

Barrahead homestead is a conservative single storey, symmetrical stone house typical of the 1850s. The corners of the walls, the doors and the windows have quoins. There is a simple U-shaped verandah, which terminates, at least on the west elevation, with a pavilion room, said to have been used as a schoolroom. The eastern end of the verandah has been enclosed. Steel posts and a straight timber beam have replaced the original timber posts and valance. The hipped roof is low pitched and is now clad with corrugated iron. Interestingly, the chimneys of the two front rooms are in the side rather than the back walls. Behind the two front rooms and under a skillion roof, there are smaller rooms and the service areas, possibly now much altered. It may be that there was a verandah across the rear elevation and a detached kitchen wing.

The house appears to have been sited deliberately on a slight rise to take advantage of its remarkable aspect and prospect. It over looks a marsh or lake which is now a water reserve. Lambing Hut Creek, a tributary of Dwyer's Creek flows immediately behind the house. The house, which is surrounded by a mature garden, is approached by a drive along which there are modern buildings.

[Access was refused for the purpose of the study. This description may be altered and amplified after a full inspection.]

HISTORY:

James Robinson Unett took up the Victoria Valley squatting run, later called Barrahead, in 1839 (B&K, 294-5). It was Portland Bay licence No. 93 and comprised 25,000 acres, with 10,000 sheep. It was located on Dwyer's Creek, approximately 18 kilometres north of Dunkeld. Henry Dwyer had taken over the run by January 1841. In 1855, the very important pastoral partnership, Thomas Robertson and Sons took over the run and held it until February 1874, when the licence was cancelled. Victoria Valley was an important part of a vast network of squatting runs owned by the partnership, focused on Mount Mitchell and Skene homesteads.

James Unett's occupation was transitory and he soon moved on to Anakie in the You Yangs area (B&K, 152). Henry Dwyer, presumably after whom the creek was named, had come from Little River, also in the You Yangs area. "Dwyer" is clearly marked on the 1941 copy of an 1842 lithographed plan of squatting runs, inns, towns and roads prepared by H. Lingham of Melbourne. He is listed in Thomas Ham's Map of Australia Felix, published in 1847, as No. 152 in the Portland Bay District. He and his wife Catherine, or Kate, had a son, John Henry, born at the "Grampians" in 1846 although the birth was registered at St James, Church of England, Melbourne (VPI, Reg. No. 15058). Another four children, two boys and two girls, were born by 1853. All the children appear to have survived childhood. "By 1854, Dwyer had 10 horses, 65 cattle and 13,700 sheep, and was paying the Government 118 pounds 7 shillings and 4 pence for the licence" (Clabburn, 33). Dwyer is listed in the 1855 Portland Bay stock assessment roll (Fawcett, 200).

The exact location of the Dwyer homestead complex is not certain. One indication, at least for the location of its woolshed, is a hollowed out tree, said to have been used as a wool press. Although very little is known about the tree or the date of its modification, it does seem clear that pastoralists used the tree to assist them in pressing their wool before 1900 and possibly as early as the 1840s. It represents a remarkable example of bush ingenuity and craftsmanship. A wheel was mounted in the excision and a pulley system with horsepower was used to compress the wool pack against the tree. The tree is located on the Old Sierra Park property, Victoria Valley Road, Victoria Valley which dates from the selection era.

Diana Halmarick states that "On 17 September 1855, the Robertson firm purchased Victoria Valley of 25,000 acres, on Dwyer's Creek and 18 miles north of Cavendish which adjoined Moora Moora's southern boundary. The run was purchased from Henry Dwyer and in [Dwyer's] Application of Lease of Crown Lands beyond the Settled District, it shows that Victoria Valley was located in the Portland Bay District and the occupation date by him was 3 March 1848" (Halmarick, 57). This is interesting because it is two years after the birth of the

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: BARRAHEAD HOMESTEAD COMPLEX

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Mirranatwa School Road MIRRANATWA

STUDY NUMBER: 318

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

Dwyers' first child and well after the date given by Billis and Kenyon. Halmarick believes that "The Victoria Valley licence was most certainly purchased for Thomas Robertson's second son, John, who had just married Mary Jane Carter, a week before the run was acquired. Soon after his marriage, on 10 September 1855, John left Moora Moora and took his new bride to live at Victoria Valley."

The original site continued to be used by the Robertsons. Halmarick states that "John moved Mary and their baby daughter Jane (born in Hamilton 1856) to Victoria Valley, and took up residence in Henry Dwyer's slab hut, the previous licensee, who had resided there as part of the main station. The hut was situated on Dwyer's Creek, about 6 miles south west of where the Victoria Valley homestead is today" (Halmarick, 222; VPI, Reg. No. 13379). In 1859 they established the new homestead complex, a small simple house on a slight rise facing north and overlooking a small water body (Clabburn, 33). No architect or builder has been associated with its construction, however the sensitivity and sensibility of the picturesque siting of the homestead betrays a well-informed owner or professional designer. John and Mary Jane Robertson had another six children, all born in the new homestead at Victoria Valley. They were to remain there until 1881 (Halmarick, 58)

Construction on the new homestead must have been completed by late in 1859. On the 3rd September "Robertson & Sons applied to the President of the Board of Lands and Works, for [the] 640 acres Home Station section of the Victoria Valley run, stating that they had met the criterion for the principle improvements 'as far as practicable' under the pre-emptive rights regulations" (Halmarick, 58). The application stated that the run had the capacity to carry 29,420 sheep, 70 cattle and 25 horses. John Robertson was given as the Superintendent. F. H. Puckle, the Commissioner of Crown Lands estimated the value of Victoria Valley to be 20/- per acre. John Robertson managed the station until he took over as owner on the dissolution of the Thomas Robertson & Sons partnership in 1872.

"Thomas Robertson, probably in poor health, instructed his solicitors to draw up his will including bequests which required the division of the Robertson & Sons holdings. A deed was signed by the firm on 9 February 1872 ending the dynasty founded twenty-one years before" (Halmarick, 65). Thomas Robertson Senior died at Mount Mitchell, Lexton, the headquarters of the dynasty, on 5th June 1872 aged 86 (VPI, Reg. No. 4627). Thomas Robertson Junior inherited "Victoria Valley, Moora Moora and Mount Burchett runs with 24,000 sheep, all other stock and station plant belonging thereto, with pre-emptive section of land Also house furniture and &c valued at 13,000 pounds. Estimated value of other assets 32,075 pounds" (Halmarick, 65)

Bailliere's Victorian Gazetteer, published for the Victorian Government in 1865, states that the Victoria Valley Station as occupied by the Messrs Robertson, comprising 67,000 acres and running 57,200 sheep (Bailliere, 403). Selectors moved into the Victoria Valley in the early 1870s, taking up much of the run. Interestingly, eighteen of the sixty of more selectors, were women although some of these may have been acting as dummies.

The selectors turned their hand to timber getting and shingle splitting as well as sheep. Infestation by the fluke worm and Black Disease were serious problems. Rabbits were an increasing nuisance in the 1870s, forcing some selectors off their land. In 1874, when F. E. Hiscock & Co. published its New Victorian Counties Atlas, Victoria Valley was still described as owned by the Messrs Robertson, comprising 67,000 acres and running 57,200 sheep, but this may be just a recycling of the information in the Gazetteer.

In 1872 Peter Fry selected Sierra Park, now Old Sierra Park, the part of Barra Head which had been the original Victoria Valley homestead. Sierra Park became famous for its superfine Saxon-Merino stud (Clabburn, 33). Betty Wooldridge provides a detailed genealogy of the family of Peter and Annie Fry as follows: "Daniel and Sarah Fry arrived in Port Phillip from Bath, England, on 13 December 1850 with their 5 children, including Peter, aged 6. The family moved to the Geelong region for a few years, and Daniel eventually went to Narranderra in 1880 to take up land. He and his sons drove bullock teams to the Grampians." According to Wooldridge, Peter Fry (1844-1919) married Annie McNeill (1851-1926) on St Patrick's Day, 17th March 1870 but the marriage is actually registered in 1874 (VPI, Reg. No. 870). They had 10 children, and lived at

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: BARRAHEAD HOMESTEAD COMPLEX

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Mirranatwa School Road MIRRANATWA

STUDY NUMBER: 318

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

Sierra Park. Peter was a staunch member of the Victoria Valley Presbyterian Church for many years. After Peter's death in 1919, Sierra Park was sold. Annie Fry moved into Dunkeld, and lived there with one of her daughters until she died in 1926.

The new owners of Victoria Valley after John and Mary Ann Robertson were the McNeil[] family (Halmarick,223). This may have been Alexander and Elizabeth Hannah McNeill, nee Fry, who lived in the Dunkeld area in the 1870s. They renamed it Barra Head after his Scottish connections at this time but the name Victoria Valley persevered. Alexander, who was born on the Isle of Skye and Elizabeth, who was born in Somerset married in 1874 and had two children, Malcolm in 1875 and George in 1877 whose births were registered at Dunkeld (VPI, Reg. No. 1551, 22372, 14968). The McNeill and the Fry families were also selectors.

The next and present owners of Barra Head are the Dark family who had also arrived in the Valley as selectors. W. J. Dark had selected the land, allotment 59 of the Parish of Mirranatwa comprising 320 acres, directly opposite the modern entrance to Barra Head. Thomas Dark had purchased the adjacent allotment 57, also 320 acres to the north. A. J. Dark purchased allotment 28A of 120 acres to the east. These appear to have been purchased in 1876. In 1874, Thomas Dark purchased allotment 3 comprising about 158 acres in the south-western corner of the Parish of Mirranatwa (Department of Lands and Survey). This is close to the point where Dwyer's Creek becomes a marsh, since drained, and it may have been the site of the original Victoria Valley homestead.

Thomas Dark arrived in, or returned to the Victoria Valley area in the early 1870s, with his two eldest sons, Arthur and William. Thomas Dark and his wife Martha Jane (nee Harman) had married in the Church of England, Belfast (Port Fairy) in 1851 (VPI, Reg. No. 30524), and soon after moved to Hamilton, where their first two children, Arthur (1854) and William (1856) were born (ibid., 7089 & 9445). It appears that the family may have been in the Victoria Valley as early as 1858, when their third child, Sarah Jane was born in 1858 (ibid., 18126). The Darks operated first as shingle cutters in the Victoria Forest, where shingles were split from wattle trees which had the bark removed and dried flat to use for local roofing. The shingles were split and sent away to be sold for use in other towns (Claburn, et. al., 33). It appears that the Dark family returned to Hamilton shortly after this, and remained there until 1874, when their tenth child, Agnes Louise was born (VPI, Reg. No., 2810).

William Dark married Phoebe Mulley in 1884 (VPI, Reg. No., 2274), and it appears that the couple moved to Brunswick, Melbourne from 1885, where at least 3 of their children were born (ibid.). Other members of the Dark family remained in the Valley, and have continued to be active members of the community, serving in the Church, Red Cross and other groups. Mr. and Mrs. Peter Dark presently own Barrahead and "Have taken seventeen years to restore the old home which still looks out over peaceful pastures and native trees towards the Grampian ranges" (Halmarick, 223)

THEMATIC CONTEXT:

Theme 2: Peopling Australia

2.4 Migrating

2.4.2 Migrating to seek opportunity.

Theme 3: Developing local, regional and national economies

3.5 Developing primary production

3.5.1 Grazing stock

3.5.2 Breeding animals

3.5.3 Developing agricultural industries

Theme 5: Working

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: BARRAHEAD HOMESTEAD COMPLEX

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Mirranatwa School Road MIRRANATWA

STUDY NUMBER: 318

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

5.8 working on the land

CONDITION:

The homestead appears to be in good condition.

INTEGRITY:

Appears to be substantially intact

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

What is significant?

Barrahead is of historical significance for its early history as the squatting run, Victoria Valley, and its subsequent development and of architectural significance as a typical and representative example of a homestead complex. The present Barrahead homestead complex is the second establishment associated with the original Victoria Valley squatting run. The first, a slab hut constructed by Henry Dwyer was located about 9.5kms to the south-west somewhere on the present Old Sierra Park property. The site, at least of the woolshed, is still marked by the so-called Woolpress Tree, an extremely rare example of a tree used to press wool into bales for transport. Henry Dwyer had taken up the run in 1841. In 1855 the large and influential pastoral partnership, Thomas Robertsons and Sons purchased the licence, apparently for Thomas Robertson's second son, John. John left Moora Moora, the Robertson run immediately to the north of Barrahead and took his new bride, Mary Jane Carter to live at the original Victoria Valley homestead. The new complex was built in 1859. No architect or builder has been associated with its construction. The second homestead is a conservative single-storey, symmetrical stone house typical of the 1850s. A pavilion room on the west side is said to have been used as a school room. The property was subdivided, as usual, for selection in the 1870s with several families establishing themselves in the area, working at timber getting and shingle splitting as well as grazing and some agriculture. The selectors had particular difficulties with fluke worm and rabbits, some abandoning their properties. In 1872 Peter Fry selected the original Victoria Valley site and called it Sierra Park, now Old Sierra Park. He married Annie McNeill, the daughter of another selector family, in 1874. In 1881, the Robertsons sold the second Victoria Valley homestead to the McNeill family who renamed it Barra Head. Subsequently Barra Head was purchased by another selector family, the Darks who appear to have been associated with Victoria valley from 1858, possibly as employees of the Robertsons or as independent timber getters and shingle splitters. The Dark family still owns Barrahead. The house appears to be in good condition and remains substantially intact although it has been altered and extended. It is set within a garden and acknowledges the broader landscape.

How is it significant?

Barrahead is of historical and architectural significance to the community of Mirranatwa, the Southern Grampians Shire and the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Barrahead is of historical significance as one of the earliest squatting runs to be established in the Grampians and, in particular for its connection with the network of runs owned by the Thomas Robertson and Sons partnership, one of the largest and most successful pastoral dynasties in Victoria. Its subsequent ownership by families who established themselves and succeeded in the Victoria Valley as selectors adds an important further dimension to the property's history. Barrahead is of architectural significance as an excellent example of a conservative homestead complex from the 1850s which is picturesquely sited to maximise aspect and prospect.

COMPARISON:

184 Woolpress Tree, (Old Sierra Park), Victoria Valley Road, Victoria Valley

185 Mona Vale Homestead Complex, Pierrepoint Road, Tarrington

232 Prestonholme Homestead Complex, Strathkellar Road, Strathkellar

320 Brooksdale Homestead and Woolshed, C Fry's Road, Victoria Valley

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: BARRAHEAD HOMESTEAD COMPLEX

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Mirranatwa School Road MIRRANATWA

STUDY NUMBER: 318

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

322 Rosebank, Neate's Road, Victoria Valley

ASSESSED BY: tfh

ASSESSMENT DATE:

16-Jan-04

EXISTING LISTINGS:

HERITAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Include in VHR Include in RNE Include in Local Planning Scheme

No Recommendations for Inclusions

REFERENCES:

Author	Title	Year	Page
Department of Justice Victoria	Pioneer Index Victoria 1836 - 1888	2001	
Department of Lands and Survey	Mirranatwa County of Dundas	1880	
Diana M Halmarick, comp.	Thos. Robertson & Sons "Mainstays of Our Earliest Days"	2000	222-230, & various
Don Watson	Caledonia Australis	1997	70-1, 105-8
F. E. Hiscock & Co.	F.E. Hiscocks & Co.'s New Victorian Counties Atlas	1874	Dundas
F. F Bailliere	Bailliere's Victorian Gazetteer and Road Guide	1865	403
Garden, Don	Hamilton A Western District History	1984	129, 141, 182, 188-9, 212, 213, 215, 218, 223, 225
Paul de Serville	Pounds and Pedigrees	1991	pp. 433, 486
R V Billis and A S Kenyon	Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip	1974	var.