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# BARUNAH PLAINS DRY STONE WALLS ENCLOSURE

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## Location

4484 HAMILTON HIGHWAY HESSE, GOLDEN PLAINS SHIRE

## Municipality

GOLDEN PLAINS SHIRE

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7621-0034

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 7, 2022

### What is significant?

The site is located on the floodplain of the Warrambine Creek approximately 750m northeast of the extant Barunah Plains homestead and 230m northeast of the mapped extent of a VHR place 'Barunah Plains'. The enclosure is possibly associated with an historic cemetery.

The site is of local historical significance for its potential to reveal information on domestic and pastoral activities in the late 19th century. The site is also significant for its association with the nineteenth century pastoral occupation of the Long Water Holes/Barunah Plains pastoral run on which it is located, and as result has historic associations with the earliest period of European settlement in the region.

### How is it significant?

### Why is it significant?

Interpretation  
of Site

N.B. The nominated site (Barunah Plains Dry Stone Wall Enclosure) was identified during a historical heritage survey that was conducted in preparation of a Historical Heritage Assessment (HHA) for a broader study area. The Historical Heritage Assessment (HHA) report of the study area as a whole is currently being prepared and will be submitted to Heritage Victoria on completion. Details of the HHA relevant to the nominated archaeological site (Barunah Plains Dry Stone Wall Enclosure) are provided below and as part of Attachment 1 (submitted with this site card). Analysis of site (interpretation) While the precise date of construction, period of use and function of the site is not currently known, the established land use history of the local area and the results of the site survey indicate that:

- The site represents an enclosure and not the remains of a building:
  - o The method of construction is comparable to nineteenth century dry stone walls located on the property; and
  - o The absence of any mortar suggests the remnant stone walls were constructed as boundary walls (i.e., an enclosure) and not a building.
- The enclosure's construction and period of use date to the nineteenth century, and that the enclosure was likely utilised for a relatively short period of time:
  - o The enclosure's construction is comparable to documented nineteenth century techniques and construction methods located on the property (e.g., dry stone walls);
  - o The site is not evident on reviewed historic nineteenth or early-twentieth century maps or plans; its absence from detailed twentieth century maps – i.e., that show the location of building, dry stone walls and other paddock fencing in the vicinity – suggest that the enclosure was ruinous/not being used/maintained/visited by this date, and that its period of use was restricted to the nineteenth century (Map 3, Attachment 1; also RASC, 1949).
- The enclosure is unlikely to have been built or utilised as an animal/stock pen: The site's location in proximity to the extant (and former) home station and outbuildings (<750m) suggests that the site is not associated with penning animals, e.g., as would have been necessary at remote locations within an established run/station (i.e., outstations were generally located at significant distances from the home station and other established paddocks/infrastructure); and
  - o The site's position on the floodplain – which would likely experience flooding during wetter months – but away from the creek makes the enclosure unsuitable for stock-related purposes such as a pen/yard areas associated with a sheep wash.
- The enclosure's form, location, and several of its component features lends support to local oral history accounts that the place was purpose built as a private cemetery:
  - o In structural form, the site reflects a common nineteenth century cemetery practice of demarcating the location/extent of a private cemetery with a walled/or fenced enclosure.
  - o The presence of planted trees within the enclosure reflects nineteenth century cemetery practices.
  - o The size and form of the 'stone arrangement' is consistent with a child's burial; secondary sources indicate that seven of the ten burials at Barunah Plains were children under the age of 3 years.
  - o As the location as a cemetery for workers and their families, the enclosure's position on the floodplain would have offered several practical advantages, namely:
    - ? the floodplain's deep (~300mm) topsoils – as compared to the shallow(~5-50mm) topsoils that characterise the surrounding volcanic plains – would have been a preferred location for a cemetery as the shallow topsoils, dense residual clays and large surface basalt floaters that characterise the surrounding volcanic plains would have represented a significant barrier to establishing a cemetery elsewhere in the vicinity; ? the site's distance (<750m) from the home station and location on the floodplain would have made the site accessible but private.
    - o Local oral history and secondary sources indicate the presence of a cemetery for workers and their families at Barunah Plains during the period 1848-1867 (see Table 1, Attachment 1).

Threshold A (archaeology) As a result of the site survey, background research, and site analysis, the nominated site has been assessed as having 'moderate to high' archaeological potential, as detailed below:

- There is 'moderate to high potential' for archaeological features and deposits to be preserved within the nominated site boundaries, specifically:
  - ? Given that the site has been identified as the potentially location of a nineteenth century cemetery there is potential for graves, grave markers and in-situ burials to be preserved within the walled enclosure; and
  - ? There is potential for additional archaeological features such as access points and pathways to be located within and in the immediate vicinity of the walled enclosure.
- Any preserved archaeological features and/or deposits will likely be associated with the nineteenth century pastoral occupation of the property and are likely to be in a condition that could contribute to an understanding of the site's historic occupation. The nominated site extent includes: The visible remains of a square dry stone wall enclosure measuring approximately 21.0m by 21.0m (assessed as having 'high' archaeological potential). The enclosed area encompasses a small stone arrangement and several historic plantings. The function of the enclosure is currently uncertain, although local oral history suggests that it marks the location of the Barunah Plains Private Cemetery (for additional details, see Attachment 1).
- A curtilage of land surrounding the dry stone wall enclosure that includes areas of identified wall collapse (north, east, south and west) and a concentration of basalt stones (east): this concentration does not appear to be a

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## History

No primary historical sources attesting to the presence or functional use of the nominated site have been identified. The dry stone wall enclosure is similarly not represented on any historic nineteenth or early-twentieth century maps or plans viewed as part of the background research undertaken during preparation of this site card (see Map 2 and Map 3, Attachment 1; also DCLS, 1866a; DCLS, 1866b; DCLS, 1879a; DCLS, 1879b; RASC, 1949).

Based on the physical form of the enclosure, its method of construction, and location in proximity to a known historical places – i.e., the extensive Long Water Hole pastoral run, encompassing the nominated site; and Thomas Russell's pre-emptive selection and Barunah Plains (H2313), located approximately 230m southwest of the nominated site – it is considered highly likely that the dry stone wall enclosure dates to/is associated with the nineteenth century pastoral occupation of the nearby historic place (Barunah Plains – H2313).

The history of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century pastoral occupation of land encompassing/in the vicinity of the nominated site beginning in the late 1830s is well documented by previous studies, including by the place history established in the gazetted registration for Barunah Plains homestead (H2313) (DELWP, 2022). The history of the pastoral occupation of Barunah Plains (H2313) and surrounds provides a valuable context to the nature of historic land use within/in proximity to nominated site. In summary:

Barunah Plains developed into a substantial and prosperous farming complex after acquisition by brothers Thomas and Philip Russell, and their cousin John Simson, in 1851. Originally known as Long Water Hole, the land was a pastoralist run from the late 1830s and leased by James Austin from the late 1840s. During the nineteenth century the pioneering Russell family became extensive landowners in western Victoria and by the 1880s Barunah Plains had developed into a leading merino sheep establishment. A house was constructed on the site in 1867 to designs by local architects Davidson and Henderson, and substantial additions increased the size of the homestead in the boom period of the 1880s. Further additions designed by Geelong architects Tombs and Durran in 1903 contain outstanding Arts and Crafts style interiors. A number of substantial bluestone outbuildings, including a large woolshed, were constructed at the property as it developed into a successful farming complex.

The 20,000 hectare property was reduced to about half its size after soldier settlement subdivision in 1949, however successive generations of the Russell family continued to live at Barunah Plains until 1978. (DELWP, 2022)

In regard to the nominated site (Barunah Plains Dry Stone Wall Enclosure), information relating the history and function of the place was relayed to the project archaeologists by the current landowner as an oral history account. Specifically, according to local oral historical accounts the stone enclosure marks the location of a private nineteenth-century cemetery associated with the historic occupation of Barunah Plains (pers. comm. Damian Canny, January 2022). While the Barunah Plains Private Cemetery is attested to in secondary sources (Hughes, 2004), no primary sources or historic maps/plans showing the location of the cemetery have been identified to date. A list of nineteenth century burials compiled by a local historian indicates that as many as 10 individuals, mostly infants and children of local shepherds/workers, were buried at Barunah Plains between 1848 and 1867 (Hughes, 2004; see Table 1, Attachment 1).

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*