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# FORMER BORONIA STATION MISTRESS' RESIDENCE

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## Location

27 ERICA AVENUE BORONIA, KNOX CITY

## Municipality

KNOX CITY

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7922-0539

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 2, 2025

### What is significant?

The Former Boronia Station Mistress' Residence represents the site of the dwelling utilised by the caretaker of Boronia Railway Station throughout the early to mid 20th century.

### How is it significant?

The Former Boronia Station Mistress' Residence is of local historical and archaeological significance for its association with the development of Boronia as a town, as well as industrial significance for its association with the evolution of the Belgrave Railway Line.

### Why is it significant?

The Former Boronia Station Mistress' Residence is of historical significance for its status as the official caretaker's residence for the Boronia Rail Station throughout the early to mid 20th century. Known station mistresses who likely resided at the site include Mrs F. Ellartt (1926), Mrs Philpot (1927-1935), Mrs Dillon Tunstall (1935-1939) and Mrs J. McHale (1939).

The Boronia Railway Station is notable for the fact that all known station masters (after it was officially staffed by the Railway Commission in 1921) were women. As such, the Former Boronia Station Mistress' Residence is of further historical significance as a representation of the evolving role of women in the workplace in the wake of the late 19th to early 20th century women's suffrage movement. Specifically, the site serves a testament to

women living onsite to serve an official role in staffing the Victorian railway network, occasionally having to relocate to stations on opposite sides of the state in order to do so (as in the case of Mrs J. McHale in 1939).

The Former Boronia Station Mistress' Residence is of industrial significance for its role in the operation of the Boronia Railway Station, serving as an official residence for the Station Mistress appointed to the Boronia Railway Station at a given time.

The Former Boronia Station Mistress' Residence is of archaeological significance for the potential for historically significant archaeological deposits and/or features to have been preserved at the site. The former residence was demolished between 1973 and 1987, with no development having been undertaken within the site since that time. As such, there is a moderate to high potential for building foundations and associated subfloor deposits to survive onsite beneath the existing gravel surface. While likely including deposits associated with the later occupation of the building (between the 1950s and 1973), there is moderate to high likelihood of occupational deposits dating to the 1920s to 1940s occupation of the residence also remaining onsite.

Any archaeological deposits or features are anticipated to shed light on everyday life of the various station mistresses who occupied the site between the early 20th to mid 20th century, when not on duty at the adjacent site office. As such, any archaeological investigations of the site would have the potential to broaden our understanding of the everyday lives of working-class women employed in the Rail Industry in the early to mid 20th century.

The site has historical significance in relation to the Victorian thematic framework, namely 03: Connecting Victorians by transport and communications and 06: Building towns, cities and the garden state. The site also has scientific significance in relation to the site's archaeological potential.

Interpretation of Site	Late 19th century to early 20th century land use of the area was primarily agropastoral. Between 1875 and the early 1920s, the site was located within land owned by Heinrich Wilhelm Zeising, who likely utilised it for farming crops and/or raising livestock. There are unlikely to be any features or archaeological deposits relating to this first phase of the site's occupation. If present, archaeological remains are most likely restricted to isolated artefacts reflecting dropped or lost items. Between the early 1920s and 1973, the site served a residential function as the dwelling provided by the Railway Commission for the caretaker of the adjacent Boronia Railway Station. Known station mistresses who likely occupied the site over this time include Mrs F. Ellartt (1926), Mrs Philpot (1927-1935), Mrs Dillon Tunstall (1935-1939) and Mrs J. McHale (1939). Archaeological features and occupational deposits relating to this phase of occupation are likely to be associated with the building footings associated with the 1920s residence and its outbuildings. If the interior of the residence featured wooden floorboards, there is also a high potential for subfloor deposits to be present. Any archaeological deposits are most likely to be associated with the occupants of the residence, reflecting its everyday domestic use. From 1987 to 2025, the site has been characterised by a vacant lot. Since at least 2006, the site has been utilised as an informal parking lot, with a gravel surface lain over the site in order to facilitate vehicle access. As the site has been otherwise undeveloped since the demolition of the Former Boronia Station Mistress' Residence, there is a high potential for the gravel parking lot to cap archaeological features and occupational deposits associated with the 1920s building.
Hermes Number	212768
Property Number	

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## History

SiteCard data copied on 02/04/2025:The area comprising the later township of Boronia was first settled by

selectors in the late 1860s (Sanders 1985: 7). The site of the later Boronia State School was located within an 86-acre (34.8 ha) allotment purchased in 1875 by Heinrich Wilhelm (Henry William) Zeising, a German immigrant (Sanders 1985: 7) (Figure 4). The founding of the existing township of Boronia is generally accredited to Alfred Elliot Chandler, who in 1895 established a Daffodil and Boronia farm on Boronia Road (Sanders 1985: 8). Chandler subsequently purchased and subdivided additional land in Boronia over the following two decades, establishing the layout of the township (Sanders 1985: 7). The Ringwood to Ferntree Gully railway line was opened on 13 December 1889 (Sanders 1985: 28). Prior to the opening of Boronia railway station, residents were forced to walk to either Bayswater or Lower Ferntree Gully railway stations, leading to increasing demand for a local station (Sanders 1985: 28). After two unsuccessful applications from the Boronia Progress Association to the Railway Association, a grant of £900 (\$87,232 as of 2024) was awarded in October 1919 for the construction of a railway platform and offices (Sanders 1985: 16). In the first year of its operation, the cost of employing a Station Master for Boronia Railway Station was paid for by the residents of Boronia (Sanders 1985: 16, 28). Mr Percy Turner was employed as the first station master, being paid a weekly salary of £2 (\$171 as of 2024). Mr James Whittle, the secretary of the Boronia Progress Association, was tasked with collecting Turner's pay from the local residents each week (Sanders 1985: 28). This arrangement lasted for 12 months, with the Railway Commission subsequently deciding to staff the railway station with official railway personnel (Sanders 1985: 28). In July 1921, the Railway Commission announced that a caretaker would be appointed to the station as soon as accommodation could be provided (The Reporter 1921: 3), indicating that the Station Mistress' Residence did not exist at this time. The Boronia Station Mistress' Residence is first depicted in the background of a 1920s photograph taken of the 1923 Boronia State School (Figure 5). As the school in this photograph is a single-room building lacking the later extensions made in 1928 (Fern Tree Gully News 1928: 2), it can be deduced that this photograph was taken between 1923 and 1928. This photograph reveals the Boronia Station Mistress' Residence to have been a single-storey brick building with a tin roof (Figure 6). A verandah is present at its western end, facing the railway station. Two chimneys are present on the southern end of the building, one of which appears to be a smaller, kitchen chimney. Several smaller sheds are also visible in the backyard of the residence. In April 1926, Boronia railway station identified as being a "woman-in-charge station", with the station being run by station mistress Mrs F. Ellartt (The Age 1926a: 9). Mrs Ellartt likely resided within the Former Station Mistress' Residence, as she is mentioned at the time of the 1926 Boronia rail disaster as having been walking back to the platform to resume work after attending to some duties at home at the time of the accident (The Age 1926b: 9). In May 1927, Mrs and Miss Philpot became the caretakers of Boronia Station, being transferred from their previous caretaker roles at St. Albans Railway Station (Sunshine Advocate 1927: 7). Mrs Philpot and Miss Nellie Philpot are again mentioned as running the railway station in November 1930 (Fern Tree Gully News 1930: 3). Mrs Philpot remained as station mistress until her retirement in late 1935 (Fern Tree Gully News 1936: 3). She was subsequently replaced in December 1935 by Mrs Dillon Tunstall (Fern Tree Gully News 1935: 2). Nellie Philpot remained in an assistant caretaker capacity until March 1937, when she was farewelled in March that year in order to be married (The Argus 1937: 5; Fern Tree Gully News 1937: 3). Dillon Tunstall is mentioned as still serving as head station mistress in September 1938, albeit with a transfer to another station expected in the near future (Fern Tree Gully News 1938: 3). She was subsequently replaced in March 1939 by Mrs J. McHale, who was transferred from Cosgrove Railway Station near Shepperton (Goulburn Valley Stock and Property Journal 1939: 3). In 1941, Boronia Railway Station is mentioned as being operated by two caretakers (Fern Tree Gully News 1941: 7), with these roles likely being synonymous with the previously mentioned station mistress and assistant station mistress. A subsequent 1947 newspaper article mentions that Boronia was only one of two remaining Victorian "caretaker type" railway stations, the other being North Essendon (Mountain District Free Press 1947: 3). In November 1944, Mary Winifred Dillon was one of the two caretakers of Boronia Railway Station (The Herald 1944: 3). The Former Boronia Station Mistress' residence is mentioned in an April 1942 newspaper article, in which it is mentioned that the building was unable to be connected to the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works water and sewerage utilities due to a shortage of labour and building materials (Fern Tree Gully News 1942: 4). The earliest available aerial photograph of the Boronia Station Mistress' Residence dates to 1945 (Figure 7), although the resolution of this capture is too low for any individual features to be discerned. The residence is subsequently depicted in more detail in aerial photographs from 1951 (Figure 8), 1962 (Figure 9) and 1973 (Figure 10). All three of photographs depict the same rectilinear dwelling, with several smaller outbuildings located at its rear. Notably, the 1973 photograph is of a sufficient resolution to depict the two chimneys situated along the southern edge of the dwelling, demonstrating that it is the same building as depicted in the 1923-1928 photograph. The layout of the Boronia Station Mistress' Residence is also depicted in a 1970 septic sewerage alteration plan (Figure 11). In this plan, the dwelling is shown to still possess the same verandah at its front end as in the 1923-1928 photograph. Several other buildings are also visible in this capture, including a possible water closet and laundry outbuildings, as well as a rectilinear portable building. A garage fronting onto Orchid Avenue is also depicted further to the rear of the dwelling, with this building having been added between 1951 and 1962 based on the aerial photographs. The site is next depicted in a 1987 aerial photograph (Figure 12). In this capture, 27 Erica Avenue is a vacant lot, with all buildings and trees having been removed. The site is

subsequently depicted in a 13 February 2006 satellite image, wherein the lot has taken on its current use as a gravel parking lot (Figure 13). No further development is evident between this capture and a later satellite image from 25 February 2024 (Figure 14).

*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/>*