

## HO110 - Kerr Farm Site



Kerr Farm Site



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Dry Stone Wall F181 - western boundary



Dry Stone Wall F181 - western boundary



Dry Stone Wall F181 - western boundary



Dry Stone Wall F186 - southern boundary



Dry Stone Wall F186 - southern boundary



Dry Stone Wall F186 - southern boundary



Dry Stone Wall F94 - eastern boundary



Dry Stone Wall F94 - eastern boundary



Dry Stone Wall F19 - walls in centre of paddock



Dry Stone Wall F19 - walls in centre of paddock



Dry Stone Wall F19 - walls in centre of paddock



Dry Stone Wall F19 - walls in centre of paddock



Dry Stone Wall F19 - walls in centre of paddock

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## Location

1780 - 1882 Boundary Rd MOUNT COTTRELL, Melton Shire

## Municipality

MELTON CITY

## Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO110

## Heritage Listing

Melton City

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

The ruinous former Kerr dairy farm complex 1780 - 1882 Boundary Road, Mt Cottrell is significant as a substantial relic of small farming practices, construction and lifestyle in the dry Werribee Plains area, and for its association with the Kerr family.

The ruinous Kerr dairy farm complex is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4, B2, D2). It is expressive of a farming era and way of life that is no longer practised. The site includes the substantial ruin of a dwelling with walls approximately 1.5 metres high, a substantial complex of drystone wall stock yards, paddocks and boundary fences in various conditions, a shallow dam, the remains of a well or cistern, the remains of an unusual gatepost, a rock whose hollowed-out form appears to be the result of human action, and a cobbled area to the northwest of the house which may be the remains of a garden area or shedding. The farm is also significant for its association with the deaths of seven of the Kerr children, one of whom drowned in the property dam, and the other six who died within the space of a few weeks as a result of diphtheria. This demonstrates the difficulties of life on isolated nineteenth century farms such as Mt Cottrell, and the susceptibility of children to diphtheria and other deadly diseases from sanitary and other contemporary problems, such as small draughty houses. The Melton community shared something of the trauma of the family's tragedy at a distressing multiple funeral. Two other of the children are reputed to be buried on the property in a location known to family descendents.

The ruinous Kerr dairy farm complex is of scientific significance at the LOCAL level (AHC C2) for its potential to provide evidence of nineteenth century small farming practices and lifestyle in the dry plains area. The construction and layout of the former dwelling, the drystone walls, the steps to the dairy/cistern, the gate and fence-posts, and the hollowed stone, have the potential to provide further research and significant information contributing to a wider understanding of the occupation of the Werribee Plains area. If the steps are to a cistern rather than a dairy it would be of particular interest in regard to information about nineteenth century water management in the dry plains area.

The ruinous Kerr dairy farm complex is also of social significance at the LOCAL level (AHC G1) for its interpretative and educative potential regarding the small farming lifestyle in nineteenth century plains area.

Overall, the ruinous Kerr dairy farm complex is of LOCAL significance.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Melton - Shire of Melton Heritage Study phase 2, David Maloney, David Rowe, Pamela Jellie, Sera Jane Peters, 2007;
Construction dates	1855,
Other Names	Kerr Dairy Farm, 1780 - 1882 Boundary Rd, Mt Cottrell,
Hermes Number	30256
Property Number	

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## Physical Description 1

### Physical Description -

The former Kerr Dairy Farm complex includes the ruins of a bluestone cottage, of interesting construction (split fieldstone) with and remnants of lime render. Some surviving sections of the rubble stone cottage are c.0.5 - 1.5 metres high. The original house was a three roomed rubble stone and mud (probably mortar) structure, with one large room, a large fireplace, and two small rooms.[1] By the time the building was vacated in 1916, it was described as being of four rooms. An early extension, or original addition (perhaps a pantry or store, or for animals), to the house is visible under the rubble around the walls.

Evidence of what was apparently a very crudely constructed cottage fence and gate survive, including a long rock, placed vertically, with a hole morticed apparently for a gate, and a very old timber post. The usual conventional underground tank was not sighted; it may be filled or buried under rubble of the cottage walls.

West of this house is a shallow excavated area, about the size of a small dam. It has about 5 bluestone steps entering into it, causing some speculation that it may have been a shallow cistern, or 'well'. [2] Alternatively it may have been a part-underground dairy or cellar. While there is no obvious evidence of a former building, some of the area around it appears to have been quite disturbed. It is an interesting relic with the potential to reveal information about the operation of early small farming in the dry Werribee plains area.

It is possible that it was shallow cistern constructed early in the settlement of the property as an alternative to the difficult work of sinking a tank through the basalt which is close to the surface in this region. (It is however likely that a conventional underground tank does also exist.)

The property also has several substantial dry stone stock yards remaining, as well as a complex of internal and boundary dry stone walls associated with a nineteenth century small farm. The wall on Boundary Road is approximately 800 metres long. The wall on the northern property boundary is approximately 250 metres long, and there are about 270 metres of internal walls. These walls were quite high (751-1000 mm), and the larger

ones on the boundaries appear to have been professionally built (although unprofessionally repaired since). Many of the internal walls have been bulldozed by the current owner, but a substantial north south wall exists from the site of the cistern or well to halfway across the paddock where it joins an east-west running wall.

Most walls are in the typically deteriorated condition of the dry stone walls in the Shire, although some are more substantial and there are a few quite good sections of wall, some retaining coping stones. The boundary fences are generally well-built and variable condition, with some reasonably intact sections, most fair, and some poor. Some walls are constructed with split fieldstones (perhaps roughly repaired in the twentieth century) and others of natural fieldstone. Despite the destruction of some of the walls in the twentieth century it nevertheless remains a precinct with a considerable number and variety of walls, including boundary and paddock fences, and stock yards, with a high potential to provide information about early farming practices in the region.

There are two small old dams, which include a few courses of drystone beeching. It may have been in one of these one of the Kerr children drowned.

An unusual hollowed-out fieldstone has the appearance of an Aboriginal water storage and drinking depression.

There are mature plantings of sugar gums that were probably planted to provide shelter for stock in the early twentieth century.

Descendents of the Kerrs are said to know the location on the site of graves containing the remains of two of the Kerr children. These were not identified during the site visit.

[1] 'James Kerr', typescript held by MDHS (by Robert Kerr?), p.2

[2] *ibid*

## **Historical Australian Themes**

*Melton Historical Themes: 'Farming', 'Water', 'Community: Towns and People'*

## **Integrity**

Integrity - Damaged/Disturbed

## **Physical Conditions**

Physical Conditions - Ruinous

*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/>*