
WOODLANDS

Location

SOMERTON ROAD GREENVALE, HUME CITY

Municipality

HUME CITY

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7822-0018

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO25

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 5, 2005

What is significant?

The Woodlands homestead and outbuildings are located within a 646 hectare park now known as Woodlands Historic Park, which is located at Greenvale on the western outskirts of Melbourne. The complex consists of a homestead (within whose courtyard there is an aviary), a number of outbuildings and the remnant garden and trees. The outbuildings of significance include the main stables, tutor's cottage, a stables/piggery, external toilet block, men's quarters, chicken coops, two tank sheds, and a garage.

The earliest section of the homestead, now designated the west wing, is an English prefabricated timber building manufactured by Peter Thompson of London. He was one of the major builders and promoters of portable houses for export to the British colonies, particularly to Australia, in the 1830s and early 1840s. William Pomeroy Greene, who was a former officer in the British Navy, brought this Thompson 'bungalow' with him when he and his family, and an entourage of servants, emigrated to Australia in 1842. He purchased 671 acres of land (the northern section of the present Park) in March 1843 and the house consisting of five rooms and a passage was

erected by early June. The timber framed walls, with their external weatherboard cladding, are infilled with brick nogging. The walls are finished internally with hard plaster. Further rooms comprising the north and south wings were added by 1846 using mostly prefabricated materials, possibly purchased in Melbourne. The bakery at the south-eastern corner of the building was built completely from local materials. The east wing was completed by 1850 and was constructed from a greater mix of prefabricated and local materials.

The main stables building, which is substantially intact, was primarily erected during the mid to late 1840s and includes accommodation for a groom's man, along with a saddle room, stable areas, and a loft. Over the years the stables housed many thoroughbreds, hunters and race horses. Most of the walls are constructed of brick, and the roof members and timber joinery are generally of prefabricated timber components. The partly sunken south room, which is separated from the rest of the building by a breezeway, was constructed of local stone and timber and the method of its construction is best described as vernacular. It is thought to have been used for making cheeses and the like but this has not been confirmed.

The earliest part of a cottage some distance to the east of the main house is believed to date to the mid-1840s and may have been the cottage built by the Greenes for the a tutor and his family in 1845. It was subsequently enlarged during the late nineteenth century. This building had fallen into a derelict state by the mid to late 20th century and has since been reconstructed.

In 1866, Andrew Sutherland, who was a merchant, purchased the Woodlands property from Rawdon Greene. Sutherland sold the property in 1873 to Charles Brown Fisher, who was at one time a prominent pastoralist with many large properties throughout much of Australia. Fisher was also closely associated with the breeding and racing of thoroughbred horses. In 1886, Fisher sold Woodlands to a syndicate of four prominent businessmen, although it is believed that he continued to graze his sheep there until 1889 when William Henry Croker, one of the syndicate, became the sole owner. Croker, who was a lawyer, was also associated with horse racing and hunting, and was closely involved with the nearby Oaklands Hunt Club, which was formed in 1888. Croker owned Woodlands until 1917 when he sold it to Ben and Cowra Chaffey.

Most of the other outbuildings appear to have been erected, or substantially modified, during Croker's ownership. The three-roomed timber Men's Quarters was built during the late 19th or early 20th century and is substantially intact. The original form and appearance of the top stables and piggery is undetermined but they are thought to have been originally built in the mid-19th century and subsequently transformed during the early part of the 20th century. They are in good condition. The timber chicken coops are thought to date to around the turn of the 20th century. The aviary in the homestead courtyard is also believed to have been erected around this time. The external toilet to the north of the homestead is believed to have been built between the 1880s and the 1920s.

Part of the homestead was altered about 1918, not long after Ben Chaffey purchased the property. The original verandahs along the west and south wings were removed and some of the material used to construct a verandah to the east wing. The piers to the new verandah along the west and south wings are constructed of locally quarried granite and the roofline of the original building was extended to rest on them. The dining room was extended and a picture window installed, and other parts of the south wing were modified internally. The blackwood panelling in the entry hall and dining room date from this time. Two small rooms were also added onto the eastern end of the north wing. The brick and timber garage is believed to have been built during the Chaffey period of ownership.

Subsequent owners of the property were the Kellow family, who owned the property from only 1937 to 1939, and the Mitchell family, who owned it from 1939 to 1978 and who made further internal alterations. The most extensive of these was the installation of the present kitchen in the 1970s and the blocking off of the original cellar underneath this area. Some of the other alterations the Mitchells made to the external fabric and some rooms have since been reversed.

In 1978, 654 acres of the original Woodlands property, along with the homestead complex, was compulsorily acquired by the State government as part of the proposed Gellibrand Hill Regional Park. It is presently owned by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment and is managed by Parks Victoria. Following the establishment and occupation of Woodlands by the Greene family the property was principally used as a country retreat and horse stud by subsequent prominent owners - Charles Fisher, William Croker and then Ben Chaffey. The homestead is now open to the public on limited days and the park is open all year round.

The internal configuration of the homestead is substantially as built between 1843 and c.1850 except for parts of the south wing as described. The original wall finishes used by the Greene family were covered over by

subsequent owners but some of those in the west wing have been recently either partly or wholly revealed. The early decorative schemes of the west wing of the homestead were painted circa 1849. Elegant floriated decorative schemes were used in four rooms, a columned and marble panelled design in another room, and a tooled ashlar scheme was employed in the hallway. These schemes are representative of the Regency style of decoration and may be the only extant example of the style in Victoria.

Few components of the garden around the homestead date from the 1840s. The most notable are the two surviving magnolia trees in the courtyard, which were planted in the mid-1840s and are believed to be the earliest surviving plantings of exotic species in the state. Several trees survive from the 1880s, of which the Aleppo pines are considered to be fine specimens. Much of the form and understorey of the garden dates from the 1920s, at which time an early irrigation system was installed by Ben Chaffey, which probably allowed for the development of a more extensive garden. Significant remaining elements of this irrigation system include the tank stand near the homestead, the two lower tank sheds and some cast iron piping. The domed well to the south of the house was the original water supply installed by the Greenes. It was concreted on the outside in 1906. Beyond the homestead complex fence, which is a reconstruction, there are other significant features including horse shelters, windmills and in-built horse jumping rails.

As a group, the general appearance of the buildings at Woodlands is consistent even though they were built over an approximately 80 year period. The roof forms are either gable or hipped and they are clad in corrugated galvanised iron, painted a rose-red colour. The weatherboard wall cladding and the stucco covered bricks have been painted in a pale blue-grey colour. The joinery has been painted a dark brown colour. This was the colour scheme of the Chaffey era of ownership.

How is it significant?

Woodlands homestead and outbuildings are of historical, aesthetic, architectural, technical, scientific, and social significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Woodlands complex is historically and aesthetically significant as a rare remnant of the early period of land occupation and settlement in Victoria. Few homesteads survive in Victoria from this period and no other survives so intact in close to its original setting. The location of Woodlands complex in a large public park of open woodland character constitutes a now rare representation of the landscape which distinguished much of the area at the time of first European settlement and which the Greene family, the first settlers of Woodlands, and subsequent owners, maintained.

The Woodlands homestead, particularly the west wing, is architecturally and technically significant as the only known example in Victoria of a prefabricated building manufactured by the London builder Peter Thompson, who built many portable buildings for export to the British colonies. Although relatively unsophisticated in terms of its structural system, it is essentially intact, retaining most of its early structural features and fabric. Prefabricated components have also been found in the main stables building. The homestead is also a rare example of a large prefabricated timber house brought to Australia in the pre-gold era.

The Woodlands complex is historically and architecturally significant for its sequence of development and use from the pre-gold rush period onwards. The form of the original, mid-19th century, single storey homestead remains substantially intact. The major alterations to the exterior, primarily the replacement of the west and south verandahs and the extension of the roof line, and the alterations to the south wing of the homestead, were made soon after the site was purchased by Ben Chaffey in 1917. They are distinct in their appearance. The outbuildings, erected from the mid-1840s to the 1920s, each contribute to the appreciation of the site as an evolving complex. Some have recently been restored or reconstructed.

The late 1840s decorative paint schemes in the west wing of the homestead are of aesthetic significance as a rare surviving example of elegant Regency styled painted decoration in the state of Victoria.

The Woodlands garden is historically and scientifically significant for its two magnolia trees, which were planted in the mid-1840s and are believed to be the oldest exotic plantings in Victoria, and for its innovative irrigation system, which was installed by Ben Chaffey in the 1920s and includes the tank sheds, tank stand and cast iron piping.

The Woodlands complex is of historical and social significance for its associations with its founders, the Greene family, one of the early pioneering families of the Port Phillip District, and with subsequent owners Charles Fisher (1873-1886), William Croker (1889-1917) and Ben Chaffey (1917-1937), who were all prominent in horse racing and pastoral circles in Victoria.

[Source: Victorian Heritage Register]]

Hermes Number 8679

Property Number

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.

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