

Victorian Heritage Database Report
BASSETT HOMESTEAD COMPLEX



Location:

Bassett's Road BRANXHOLME, Southern Grampians Shire

Heritage Status / Level of Significance:

Stage 2 Heritage Study Complete

Statement of Significance:

What is significant?

Bassett Homestead Complex, located on the Crawford River immediately to the west of the township of Branholme, was subdivided off the earlier Crawford run in 1847. The original lease was held by Christopher Bassett who was murdered by Aborigines in 1843. The subdivision took his name. The next owners were the partners A. R. Cruickshank, a Melbourne businessman with interests in Portland, and Henry Monro, who appears to have run the property. The property was subdivided again in 1854 when it was purchased by John McNicol. The first section of the substantial stone homestead probably dates from this time. It was sold again to William Skene, one of the most important early squatters who had a strong Scottish background. He founded a dynasty, based on the original run Mount Mitchell near Ballarat and at Skene at Strathkellar, with connections into the most important pastoral families. His son Thomas managed Bassett and was probably responsible for the construction of another wing across the front of the first homestead. It seems to have been conventional and modest. Thomas was a leading figure not just in the District but in Victoria, being a member of Parliament in the Upper and then the Lower House. He was a staunch supporter of Free Trading, Federation and Closer Settlement. Bassett was famous at that time as a sheep stud and for its racehorses. The property passed to Henry Edkins in 1882 through his wife Caroline Arabella, nee Broughton, and her sister. Edkins was an important negotiator in the battle between the pastoralists and the shearers which blew up in 1888. The Edkins sold out to William Riggall, one of the most influential and well respected solicitors in Victoria. He gave Bassett to his daughter, Ada and her husband, William Tully. They were responsible for the grandest addition to the homestead built in 1907 which was designed by the leading firm of architects, Reed, Smart & Tappin, founded by Joseph Reed in the mid 1850s and now one of the oldest architectural firms in the world. Their work is rarely found in the Western District. The next owners, the Whiting family engaged the fashionable Melbourne architect, Robert Hamilton to modernise the house in the mid 1930s. The homestead remains largely intact to this period and is in excellent condition. It is set within a substantial landscaped garden and park, parts of which may date back to the mid-1850s. The complex includes an extensive range of outbuildings all of which retain a high degree of integrity and are in very good condition.

How is it significant?

Bassett Homestead complex is of historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria and to the Southern Grampians Shire.

Why is it significant?

Bassett Homestead complex is of historical significance for the death of Christopher Bassett, for its key role in the battle in 1888 between pastoralists and shearers, and for its associations with several very important individuals including: the absentee owners A. R. Cruickshank MLC and William Riggall who were both pastoralists and distinguished professionals in Melbourne; the founder of the Robertson dynasty, William Robertson and his son Thomas Robertson MLC and MLA. It is of architectural significance for its sequence of development through three major stages, including in particular the third stage designed by the leading Melbourne firm of architects, Reed, Tappin and Smart. It remains a substantially intact complex of pastoral buildings focused on the homestead and set within a landscaped garden and park.

Description

All the structures are in very good condition.

The existing homestead at Bassett appears to have been built in three major stages, two in bluestone each with paired, hipped, corrugated iron roofs, and one in brick with gabled terra cotta tiled roofs.

The first section may date from about 1854 when Bassett was sold to John McNicol. Of the two stone sections, it seems more likely that the rear section is the earlier because the addition of the second stage, probably after 1868 when William Skene bought Bassett, now the middle section, blocked off former windows and required the installation of skylights. The opening for original front door was reconstructed to become a deep archway with recessed panels in the arch and paired pilasters supporting its architrave. The detailing of interior of the middle section is finer than the rear. The external detailing of these two sections also differs in that the rear section has heaving rusticated quoins at the corners and around the doors and windows. The detailing of the unusual large shuttered window in the corner office 'pavilion', suggests early construction. At the other end of the rear section a large chimney, in the present kitchen, which suggest that the room has always been the kitchen. This is reinforced by the small rooms forming a pavilion at the other end of the back verandah, now enclosed. The kitchen verandah may be a remnant of a verandah across the original facade. A new verandah was constructed on three sides of the second section, which had paired columns, intriguingly off centre with the second front door. A timber addition of three rooms and passages shown on the existing conditions drawing in 1907, probably the second verandah partly enclosed, has been demolished. The original six paned double hung sash windows of both these sections have been replaced. Some new windows were introduced, probably at the time the third section was added in 1907.

The third section of the homestead is constructed in a hybrid Federation style using dark brown bricks, cement render detailing (now mostly painted white), a timber verandah and French terra cotta tiles. The bricks were made locally in Branhholme at the Wiltshire Brothers kiln. The asymmetry of the projecting gabled window bays and the porch are united by the single main gabled roof. Other features, such as the bijou window, the tall brick chimneys and the timber verandah enhance the picturesque massing of the design. The front door surround is glazed with typical coloured and textured glass in pale pastels shades. The hall chimney breast is interesting for its tapered breast. Importantly, the house is set low to the ground, increasing its informality. There have been timber additions to the side of the verandah, since removed. The whole of the interior appears to have been redecorated because picture rails, typical of the 1900s, have been fitted into the middle and rear sections and some timber mantels were introduced, the one in the dining room being particularly fine. The homestead was renovated extensively again in the mid-1930s. The modernisations included the replacement of several fireplaces, the introduction of a new bathroom and a complete redecoration.

The homestead is approached by a curving gravel drive which opens onto a circular area in front of the facade. The garden is substantial. In 1868 it already comprised 2 acres and there was an orchard. An 1886 description mentions sycamores, Oriental planes, blue gums, and pines of different species. When Bassett was sold in 1925, the garden which appears to have been further developed with the 1907 addition, was described as "splendid".

To the rear and side of the homestead there are several outbuildings all with corrugated iron roofs. These include a weatherboard laundry and a small meat house close to the kitchen door. There is a brick dairy with wide eaves and small windows. Opposite the rear yard there is a small timber building, used as a woodshed, beside a large tank stand. These are both clad with finely corrugated iron. Beyond the rear yard there is a stone building which appears to have been used as a coach house, stable and groom's room. Further away from the house there are more recent sheds and in the far distance the woolshed which, typical in its form and clad in corrugated iron.

Theme 2 Peopling Australia

2.6 Fighting for land

2.6.1 Resisting the advent of European and their animals

2.6.2 Displacing Indigenous people

Theme 3: Developing local, regional and national economies

3.5 Developing primary production

3.5.1 Grazing stock

Theme 5: Working

5.2 Organising workers and work places

5.8 Working on the land

Continuing as a pastoral property

All buildings have a high degree of integrity to the Interwar period

Christopher Bassett, first leaseholder, killed by Aborigines on land near Bassett Homestead

Henry Monro[e], Second lease holder

Andrew Rose Cruickshank, Joint third owner with Henry Monro

John McNicol, second leaseholder of Bassett

William Skene, third leaseholder

Thomas Skene, son of William and Jane Skene, manager under his father and subsequently fourth owner

William Riggall, fifth owner and father-in-law of William Tully

William and Ada Tully, sixth owners

Reed Tappin Smart, architects for the 1907 addition.

Pre-emptive Right

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| Heritage Study / Consultant | Southern Grampians - Southern Grampians Shire Heritage Study, Timothy Hubbard P/L, Annabel Neylon, 2002 |
| Construction Date Range | 1850 - 1907 |
| Architect / Designer | Reed, Smart & Tappin |
| Municipality | SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE |
| Other names | |
| Hermes number | 23192 |
| Property number | |

This place/object may also be State heritage listed. Check the Victorian Heritage Database. For further details, contact the local Council or go to Planning Schemes Online