

Victorian Heritage Database Report

# PRESTONHOLME HOMESTEAD COMPLEX AND FLOURMILL



**Location:**

Mill Road and Strathkellar Road STRATHKELLAR, Southern Grampians Shire

**Heritage Status / Level of Significance:**

Stage 2 Heritage Study Complete

**Statement of Significance:**

What is significant?

In 1836, the explorer, Major Mitchell camped for the night on the land that became Prestonholme on his return journey to Sydney. His discovery of Australia Felix was the beginning of a great land rush by squatters overland from New South Wales and over Bass Strait from Van Diemen's Land. Much of what came to be known as the Portland Bay District was administered from the Grange Burn, later known as Hamilton. The Wedge Brothers first occupied the land in 1839 laying claim to a large run, called The Grange, which appears to have been centred on the modern city of Hamilton with its homestead immediately to the north of the present Prestonholme. In 1840, The Grange was divided into two runs, the eastern portion retaining the name The Grange and the western portion, but still east of the modern city, being known as Grange Burn. Captain William Lonsdale, the former Police Magistrate of Melbourne, took up The Grange in 1840. Grange Burn was taken up by Andrew and William Forlonge and managed by David Edgar until 1845. The Forlonge Brothers subdivided

the property in Grange Burn No 1 and Grange Burn No 2, both were purchased by James Brown in 1845. When he sold his interests in 1847, Grange Burn No 1 to the south of the stream became Pierrepont and Grange Burn No 2, to its north became Prestonholme. The brothers George Napier and Douglas Bannatyne Craig purchased Grange Burn No 2. In 1850, Dr John Sealy Griffin replaced D. B. Craig. A plan by the important local government surveyor Lindsay Clarke published in 1851 shows their homestead complex on the opposite side of the Strathkellar Road from Prestonholme and extending to the Grange Burn. Section 11 of the proposed Parish of North Hamilton became the Grange No. 2 and consequently the Prestonholme Pre-emptive right, thereby linking Prestonholme to one of the earliest and most important sites in the Western District after the Henty family runs further west.

George Younger bought much of the Prestonholme land and the former homestead complex in September 1854, the remainder being purchased by his brother-in-law, Alexander Affleck. The oldest part of the existing homestead, just two rooms with French doors and a service wing at the rear, appears to date from this time. The surviving outbuildings probably date from this time, as well. Peter Learmonth, another Scot who came over Bass Strait from Van Diemen's Land and, through his seven sons, the patriarch of the Learmonth family in Victoria, bought Prestonholme in 1858. He had married Mary Jervey Pearson who had connections with families of millers in Port Fairy and on the Bellarine Peninsula. Learmonth not only extended the homestead in two more stages in the 1860s and 1880s, he also built the flourmill and other associated structures at the rear of the homestead complex and close to the Grange Burn. As well as successful pastoral and financial interests in and around Hamilton, Learmonth through this and other mills became the most successful miller in the further Western District. He was also a leading citizen in public affairs. Over the years a conventional garden was developed around the homestead, much of which survives in its larger scale, including a Bunya Bunya Pine, *Aracaria bidwillii*, which was one of a pair. The flourmill closed in 1892 and Learmonth died the following year. His eldest son Allan and his wife, Annie nee Thomson returned from the family's Mexican estates to live at Prestonholme. The homestead survives with a high degree of integrity and in very good condition. The outbuildings also survive, although modified internally for modern business uses. The flourmill survives, but with one storey and the chimney removed and in poor condition. The waterworks also survive.

How is it significant?

Prestonholme is of historical, social, architectural and scientific significance to the community of Hamilton, the Southern Grampians Shire and the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Prestonholme is of historical significance for its direct link with one of the oldest sites in the Western District and the distinguished list of persons connected with it as owners and otherwise. These connections are demonstrated particularly in the sequence of development of the homestead, started by George Younger, and especially in the flourmill built by Peter Learmonth. The flourmill at Prestonholme is of historic significance for its central role in the broader milling industry throughout the further Western District. Prestonholme is of social significance because, by the late 1880s, the homestead was the focus of one of the great dynasties of the Western District and the destination for sons returning from their Mexican enterprises. It represents the roles of Peter Learmonth, his wife and sons and their wives played not only in finance and civic affairs, but also in the creation of cultural values in Hamilton and its hinterland. The Learmonths' social legacy continues to this day. Prestonholme demonstrates architectural significance in its typical development as a conservative and modest homestead enhanced by its garden setting. It is also a rare example of a substantial industry, other than pastoralism and agriculture, being located adjacent to a principal residence. The flourmill at Prestonholme is of scientific significance as an excellent example of Georgian inspired colonial industrial design, serviced if not established by Bodingtons, leading flour milling engineers in Victoria.

## Description

The homestead is in good condition. The outbuildings are in good condition. The garden is in fair condition, with much of the small scale detail removed. The flourmill is in poor condition. The *Araucaria bidwillii* is in good condition.

The homestead at Prestonholme has been constructed in at least three stages, the first dating before 1860 and possibly as early as 1854 when it was purchased by George Younger. The earliest stage, shown in a photograph in Mariposa, (Macdonald, 16), is masonry, has two rooms, each with a twelve paned double-hung sash window and, to either side, a French window. The roof is hipped with a shallow pitch and possibly roofed with slate. There is one chimney at the back of the northern room, now removed. Behind and contiguous with the front range there is a lower service wing with a skillion attached to the side and two chimneys indicating cooking arrangements at the far end. At least the front range survives with its fenestration intact. The walls have since been rendered and coursed to simulate ashlar masonry. This unusual plan suggests strongly that additions were always intended to be made to the homestead.

The photograph also shows the two existing stone outbuildings, conventional in their single storey form, with hipped roofs, massive chimneys and simple verandahs. They survive little altered externally except for a new verandah. There are yards divided by timber fences; paling fences around the house and outbuildings and rail fences further away. There is no garden visible.

In the far distance the flourmill is clearly visible but different from its present appearance. Its form is standard for late Georgian milling technology. It is several storeys high but how many is not certain. The gabled roof is finished with parapet walls and a string course, all treated as a simple pediment with a single opening in the centre. This suggests that the top storey has been removed from the mill because the roof now goes over the walls, there is no string course, and there are two openings in the present gable. The date of the removal, a common practice for tall buildings which become unstable, is not known. The square sectioned, tapered chimney has also been demolished and removed. The stone work for the mill pond, which was used for swimming at least until the Second World War, probably survives. The mill is now derelict and abandoned.

The second stage of the homestead appears to have been the southern range of rooms. The relatively simple internal detailing, and especially the joinery, suggests a relatively early date, probably the 1860s. Another old photograph of the homestead in the 1880s (Macdonald, 17) shows the present bay window with double hung sash windows, the large central sashes divided by central glazing bars which survive. There is a chimney breast in the wall opposite the bay window. This front room has a cellar beneath it and a trap door for access set into the verandah floor. It is not known in detail how the rear elevation was changed at this time but works appear to have occurred.

The third major stage was the construction of the northern range of rooms including, the cast iron verandah and porch (although the verandah may be earlier), the front door and the hall. These appear in the photograph dated as taken in the 1880s. This range was constructed at a slightly higher level, creating an unusual stepped verandah and internal steps from the hall to the passage behind the two original rooms. The scale, bay window and internal details certainly indicate a later nineteenth century date of construction confirmed by the elaborate plaster ceiling rose in the large main room typical of the late 1880s. The white marble mantel of the fireplace opposite the bay window, on the other hand, is relatively standard. This range of rooms survives with a high degree of integrity. There was a shade house or conservatory along the northern elevation which probably dated from the same time or soon after. Plumbing survives at the western end. Post Second World War modernisations have occurred at the rear of the homestead.

### Theme 3. Developing local, regional and national economies

#### 3.5 Developing primary production

##### 3.5.1 Grazing stock

##### 3.5.3 Developing agricultural industries

##### 3.12 Feeding People

##### 3.12.2 Developing sources of fresh local produce

### Theme 5 Working

#### 5.8 Working on the land

nursery with the flourmill abandoned.

Homestead retains a very high degree of integrity. Early 20th C conservatory/fern house has been demolished.

Staff quarters and other outbuildings substantially altered to accommodate current nursery business. Mill may have had one storey removed. Generally in poor condition.

Major Thomas Mitchell, explorer who camped at Prestonholme on 12th September 1836

Wedge Brothers (John Helder, Charles, Richard and Henry), first occupiers 1839-1840

Forlonge Brothers (Andrew and William), second occupiers 1840-1845

James Brown, occupier 1845-1847

George Napier Craig and Douglas Bannatyne Craig, occupiers July 1847-September 1850

Dr John Sealy Griffin and George Napier Craig, occupiers September 1850- September 1854

George Younger, occupier September 1854 - 1860

Peter Learmonth, occupier from 1858/9, owner from 1860

Allan Learmonth, owner from 1893

Prestonholme Nurseries, owners post WW2

Grange Burn No. 2 Pre-emptive right, specifically the land south of the Strathkellar Road

Heritage Study / Consultant	Southern Grampians - Southern Grampians Shire Heritage Study, Timothy Hubbard P/L, Annabel Neylon, 2002
Construction Date Range	1853 -
Architect / Designer	
Municipality	SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE
Other names	
Hermes number	23315
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*