

Victorian Heritage Database Report

STRATHDOWNIE HOMESTEAD COMPLEX



Location:

DURBRIDGES LANE, STRATHDOWNIE, GLENELG SHIRE

Heritage Status / Level of Significance:

Recommended for Heritage Overlay

Statement of Significance:

What is Significant?

The Strathdownie Homestead Complex, located at the intersection of the Glenelg Highway and Johnston Road, Strathdownie was established as a squatting run as early as 1845 by Captain Charles Hutton. The run was focused on the swamp created by Eel Creek, since drained. It has often been held in association with West Strathdownie. By 1849, both leases were owned by Thomas and Somerville Learmonth, the very important pioneers of Ercildoune near Ballarat. They sub-leased East Strathdownie to George Coutts, another pioneer and then the lease was taken over briefly by John McKellar. He sold to William and Angus McEachern,

the most important owners of East and West Strathdownie in the nineteenth century although their base was at Heathfield, rather than East Strathdownie. They failed because of sheep diseases exacerbated by the run's proximity to the swamp and sold to the great financier, Henry 'Money' Miller who purchased the land on which the homestead complex stands from the Crown. At some stage a substantial timber house was built, possibly as early as 1849. It was converted into a woolshed when the original woolshed burnt down and, with extensions and modifications, it is still in use. There is a Ferrier wool press, No. 125 in the main extension. The stripped structure reveals much about the original house, retains a high degree of integrity as a woolshed and is in good condition. This conversion may have prompted the construction of a new masonry homestead further to the east which was substantially extended about 1904 in a modest interpretation of the Federation style. The original sections were demolished after the Second World War but the extension retains a high degree of integrity externally and is in excellent condition. A large garden of exotics conventional for the Federation period and an extensive drive with an avenue of *Ulmus procera*, English Elms was planted at the same time. It is believed to have been planted by Beatrice Brown, the daughter of the owner, Andrew Henry Brown. The broader garden setting, developed appropriately by the present owners, continues to compliment the house. Between the present house and woolshed there is a small timber worker's cottage with a distinctive double chimney. It retains a good degree of integrity but is in very poor condition.

How is it Significant?

Strathdownie East Homestead Complex is of historical and architectural significance to the Glenelg Shire.

Why is it Significant?

Strathdownie East Homestead Complex is of historical significance for its early date of establishment and the sequence of development since, and particularly for its succession of largely absentee but important owners. The ownership and occupation of Andrew Henry Brown and his family is also important, especially for the development of the garden. The complex is of architectural significance because the house provides a modest contrast to some of the grander Federation period homesteads in the Shire. The house is strongly supported by the garden and drive. The complex is also of architectural significance for the conversion of the early timber residence into a woolshed and for the timber cottage which provides evidence of the lifestyle of workers at Strathdownie East.

Description

continuing as pastoral

The Strathdownie Homestead Complex comprises the main house, the surrounding garden, the avenue of *Ulmus procera*, English Elms forming a drive, the timber worker's cottage and the timber woolshed. The single-storey house was built in stages from the mid-nineteenth century to the late nineteenth century, the last and largest being a conservative interpretation of the Federation style with a timber verandah, prominent chimneys and half-timbered gables typical of the period. Although the interiors retain much of their period details, they have been modernised. The house retains a very high degree of integrity on the exterior and the whole is in very good condition.

The garden surrounding Strathdownie East homestead is large and typical in form and planting for the early twentieth century. Over time, the garden has lost the complexities of shrub borders, perennial beds and other detail, now being mainly specimen trees set in lawns. Many trees have been planted by the Harvey family over the past fifty years, although strong evidence of the early garden survives, primarily in the specimen trees. There are two fine *Phoenix canariensis* (Canary Island Palm), some fifteen metres east of the front of the house. This is slightly unusual for the period, as *Phoenix canariensis* were at this time usually planted symmetrically, either in front of the house, or on either side of the main entrance of the house. Other plantings surrounding the palms include a *Populus* spp. (Poplar), a *Cedrus* spp. (Cedar), *Prunus cistena* (Purple leaf plum), and several low shrubs. It is likely that these plantings date from the past fifty years. Towards the rear of the garden, a number of deciduous trees, probably dating from the same 1904-5 period survive. To the west side of the garden several deciduous trees, mainly *Quercus robur* (English oak) and *Ulmus procera* (English

Elm) survive, probably from the 1904-05 period also. The main driveway is a standout feature, being a closely planted avenue of *Ulmus procera*, which create a distinct sense of arrival at the homestead. Although it is unlikely to have been laid out as a grand garden, the mature specimen plantings compliment the homestead.

The timber worker's cottage is approximately 400m west of the house. It is a small, symmetrical timber framed and weatherboard clad structure with two substantial brick chimneys which are joined, serving separate rooms on the west side. The simple hipped roof is corrugated iron. The doors are ledge and brace construction. The surviving windows are 12 paned, double hung sashes without counter-weights. Much of the internal lining of the building has been removed and some of the weatherboards have been replaced with corrugated iron at the rear. Although substantially intact, the building is generally in very poor condition.

The woolshed has been built in stages, extending to the north and west. The earliest part was almost certainly a residential building. Much of the structure has been modified, particularly internally with walls removed and a verandah enclosed. This reveals remnants of a shingle roof, timber in the round used as rafters, mortise and tenon joints and other notches in pit-sawn timber, framing around a chimney on the north end, since removed, evidence of lathe and plaster walls and other details. The studs around the original doors and windows now frame the gates to the holding pens. The former verandah is now the shearing board. Certain crude details and finishes, such as a gate and its hinges made from bush timber, suggest that the conversion was done earlier rather than later in the history of the place. Otherwise, the detailing of the woolshed is standard. The original facade was symmetrical and the house faced generally east, i.e. towards the present house and over Eel Creek and its associated swampy ground. All these details combined suggest that the dwelling was substantial and well finished for the time and that, possibly, it predates the earliest parts of the present house. There is a Ferrier wool press, with the number 125 painted on it, in the main extension of the woolshed.

The house is in very good condition. The worker's cottage is in very poor condition. The woolshed is in good condition.

Heritage Study / Consultant	Glenelg - Glenelg Shire Heritage Study Part One, Carlotta Kellaway, David Rhodes Mandy Jean, 2002; Glenelg - Glenelg Heritage Study Stage Two (a), Heritage Matters, 2006
Construction Date Range	1849 -
Architect / Designer	
Municipality	GLENELG SHIRE
Other names	
Hermes number	52793
Property number	

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