



HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

Name DIGBY VILLAGE PRECINCT
Address BOWEN ST, DIGBY BUCKINGHAM ST, DIGBY CLARKE ST, DIGBY COLDHAM ST, DIGBY MCLEAN ST, DIGBY RUSSELL ST, DIGBY SIMPSON ST, DIGBY
Place Type Mixed Use Precinct
Citation Date 2006
Significance Level Local

Recommended VHR No HI No PS Yes
Heritage Protection

History and Historical Context

The township of Digby began, as was usually the case, with an inn close to an important crossing over a water course, in this case the Emu Creek, later known as Stokes River. The Woolpack Inn was established in 1843 by Richard Lewis on the south side of the creek on the track between Portland and Casterton, which became the Henty Highway. Lewis later took up land, and built the homestead 'Rifle Downs', outside of Digby.

The hotel burnt down in 1887, and the proprietor, Mrs. Southern was jailed for two years for arson, although she was later found to be innocent (Editorial Committee, 'Heritage', 1977). The surveyor Lindsay Clarke had drawn up a plan of the proposed township along typical lines by 1852 and names appear on some of the allotments although the first land sales did not occur until 1861. Some of the early land holders listed on the map drawn up by Clarke were J. Joyce, who six allotments throughout the township, J. G Ottey, who held four allotments, including allotment nine of section VI, on the north east corner of Clarke and Crawford Street, where his store was located (this is drawn on the map); Nathaniel Burgess held three allotments, where his Blacksmiths shop was located on the corner of Coldham and Crawford Streets as well as many more. The early plan shows that most of Section I, bounded by Simpson Street, Ross Street, Russell Street and Clarke Street, was in 1852 a Cultivation Paddock. A yard of some type was located in the centre of section VI, Lewis' Inn complex is clearly marked on the south west of Crawford and Clarke Streets, with its numerous buildings and extensive gardens, and several other buildings are scattered around the town, some on the immediate River Flats. Only one reserve was provided, allotments 1-4 of section VIII, which was for the Church of England, which operated as a Sunday School site from the 1850s, the church being built in 1860. As usual, the main streets are named after the local squatters, such as the Coldham Brothers, the first occupant of the Grassdale, lease. Interestingly unlike most towns in the district, none of the early street names are Henty, after the best known squatters of the area. By 1865, the official Victorian Gazetteer could state that "Digby is a postal village ... situated on the River Stokes, or Emu creek, 240 miles W. of Melbourne, on the main line of road to Portland, distant 41 miles, and Casterton distant 19 miles. The district is almost exclusively pastoral, and abounds with timber, the cutting of which forms the chief support of the inhabitants, who derive a living from supplying sawn timber, posts and rails, shingles, paling, &c ... It has a court of petty sessions, and a post and money order office, the hotels are the Woolpack and the Digby." (Bailliere, 115). The booklet produced in 1977 for Digby and Merino "Heritage", states that between 1861-1871 the population growth of Digby area expanded from 179 to 241 people. The Court of Petty Sessions held the first sitting of the Supreme Court in 1869 (Editorial Committee, 1977).

The town soon developed as a service centre for the timber getting district. There were no mills in the centre of the town, but Eldridge and Rice operated a steam saw mill at Digby from 1862, although not known. It is likely that many of the early timber houses in the town are constructed from local sawmill produced timbers. J. G Ottey operated the most important store, Ottey's General Store from the early 1850s. The store was located opposite

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Lewis' Inn, on the north east corner of Crawford and Clarke Streets. The store is gone, but it is likely an important archaeological site, and some fruit trees remain. The general periods of economic growth in Digby, evidenced by the building and establishment of commercial buildings appear to have been in three distinct periods. The first, 1840-1855, saw the establishment of Lewis' Inn, Ottey's General Store, Burgess' Blacksmith, established 1846 (in Crawford Street) and the Digby Hotel. The Digby Hotel was built in 1856 by Mr Buckle. This was a large 13 room structure in timber, with a spring at the front door, and the capacity to hold 600 head of stock, so drovers or bullockies could camp at the hotel. This was destroyed in 1935, and the current hotel rebuilt on the site. It is reported that in this period, a cluster of crude timber huts were located along the Emu Creek (Stokes River), and cluster of huts along the creek, supposedly for protection against the aborigines – the exact location of the huts is not known, but it is probably in what is now known as Crawford Street. Fresh water for drinking was taken from the spring in the centre of the town, located between Spring and Buckingham Streets (Editorial Committee, 1977). The second period of development occurred between 1855-1875, when the timber industry expanded rapidly, as the influx of settlers created demand for timber construction in south west Victoria. By 1860, Digby boasted a post office, court of petty sessions (in a new wooden building), a police station, two hotels, a Church of England school and number of other dwellings (Ibid.). By 1874, this was added to by, four stores, an insurance agent, school, foresters lodge, band of hope, butcher, baker, blacksmith, wheelwright, carpenter/undertaker, shoemaker, combined butcher bakery, mechanics institute and town herdsman. The other main period of development was the interwar period, between 1918-1939, when a number of small timber shops were built, as well as simple timber and other dwellings. World War One had a devastating effect on the population of Digby and district. Eighty five men enlisted to serve, out of a community of about 200 people. In response to the great sacrifice that was made by these people, Digby established the Avenue of Honour along Clarke Street in August 1917. The Elms planted in the avenue represent the 85 men served in this war. In addition, a Soldiers Memorial Hall was erected in 1926, with funds raised from the community.

The first school was established in 1857 on the site of the Church of England Sunday School. In 1864, the Digby Common School No. 191 opened with enrolment of 46. The new brick school was constructed in 1878 on the site of the present school, and by 1878 there were about 100 pupils. A school residence was built in 1890. The Digby School was rebuilt in timber in 1938.

The town had at one time, three functioning churches. St. John the Evangelist Church of England was constructed in 1860, although services were said to have been held at Rifle Downs from as early as 1849. The Presbyterian Church was not built until 1908, reflecting the limited Presbyterian population in the town in the early period. The Wesleyan Church (now demolished) was constructed in 1875.

Although many nineteenth century buildings have been lost, such as the Wesleyan Church, the original hotels and stores and the Forester's Hall, and many have been substantially altered, such as the Mechanic's Institute and although the township is in decline, measured by its falling population and the closure of businesses and withdrawal of some public services, Digby retains a dignified and well-established character. The Mechanics Institute still serves as a community centre.

References

- Township of Digby at the River Stokes, County of Normanby, Surveyor General's Office, 1852.
Heritage Editorial Committee, 1977. *Editorial Committee* (self published).
Whitworth, Robert P (compiled by), *Bailliers's Victorian Gazetteer and Road Guide*, Containing the Most Recent and Accurate Bailliere, O. F. F. *Information as to every Place in the Colony*, 1865, London.

Relevant Historical Australian Themes

Theme 2 Peopling Australia

Theme 3: Developing local, regional and national economies

3.5 Developing primary production

3.5.1 Grazing stock

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3.5.2 Breeding animals

3.5.3 Developing agricultural industries

Theme 5: Working

5.8 Working on the land

Theme 6 Educating

6.2 Establishing schools

6.5 Educating people in remote places

Theme 8 Developing Australia's cultural life

8.12 Living in and around Australian homes

8.14 Living in the country and rural settlements

Description

Physical Description

The Digby Village Precinct is centred on the main thoroughfare, Clarke Street which also forms part of the Portland-Casterton Road. This has been the traditional route from Portland through to Casterton and beyond into South Australia since the earliest days of settlement, and follows the tracks established by the Henty Family in the 1840s. The Precinct is irregular in shape, but generally could be considered to be bounded by Crawford Street to the north, Ross Street to the east, the Dartmoor-Hamilton Road and Bowen Street to the south and various title boundaries between McLean and Coldham Streets to the west.

Clarke Street, which runs generally north-south has the highest density of surviving contributory buildings and plantings, including the St. John the Evangelist Church of England, and the Uniting Church, which form landmarks at either end of the precinct, and are linked by the Avenues of Honour. The Avenue of Honour is a very early example of its type in Victoria, being planted in August 1917 and dedicated to the men of Digby and the surrounding district who served in World War One. The avenue, which is planted out with 99 EIMs has been extended to include trees for those who served in World Two. The Avenue of Honour is an important part of the township. Clarke Street is clearly the main street of the town, and houses the primary commercial, civic and religious buildings of Digby. A number of Heritage Inventory sites, both residential and commercial, are also clustered at the crossing of the River on Clarke Street, just below the Crawford Street precinct boundary. The original timber bridge, and later concrete bridges have been replaced with modern road bridges due to flooding, but several river crossings and fords are still evident nearby. Buckingham Street runs east west, and is likely to have been an early route to surrounding pastoral properties such as Rifle downs and Crawford River.

This street also has a high concentration of heritage places and heritage inventory sites which contribute to the precinct overall. The places in Buckingham Street tend to be all residential (both inventory sites and heritage places), the majority being small houses and cottages, predominantly of timber, reflecting Digby's early history as a timber-getting town. Several of the cottages and houses around the town, as well as the heritage inventory sites display some very early remnant plantings of trees, shrubs and bulbs. A fine garden surrounds the State School, located on the south east corner of Brown and Coldham Streets. While the school itself has been removed, a timber teacher's residence (former) survives on the site, surrounded by mature European and native trees, mainly planted as Arbor Day projects by the school children of the town. Crawford Street, which runs parallel to the river has a series of largely vacant allotments on its north side. These are highly significant archaeological sites which represent the bulk of the earliest dwellings in Digby. The dwellings were largely washed away or ruined in a major flood in the 1940s. The allotments in this area do however have the potential to yield substantial archaeological finds. There are broad spaces between the surviving fabric of the township. Some spaces indicate small scale self sufficiency, which was practiced by most of the residents in Digby from the 1850s. Evidence survives which shows that many houses had their own milking cow, other animals for meat, a vegetable garden, fruit trees and fowl. The views into the rear allotments of Clarke Street from Ross Street can show this previous land use. The following elements are significant and contributory to this precinct:

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CONTRIBUTORY PLACES:

- . Timber cottage, 32 Buckingham Street, Digby
- . Drover's Retreat (cottage) and orchard, 52 Buckingham Street, Digby
- . Inter-war weatherboard house, 56 Buckingham Street, Digby
- . Butchers Shop (former), 3228 Portland-Casterton Road, Digby
- . Timber house, 3267 Portland-Casterton Road, Digby
- . Orchard, Northwest Corner of Clarke and Russell Streets, Digby
- . Weatherboard cottage and mature Oak and Pines, 1 Coldham Street, Digby
- . Timber house, 57 Coldham Street, Digby
- . House, 41 Crawford Street, Digby
- . The Springs Reserve, between Buckingham and Spring Streets, to the east of Clarke Street, Digby
- . Timber house, 24 Russell Street, Digby
- . Nakamura, Timber house (altered), 25 Russell Street, Digby
- . Inter-war timber house, 53 Simpson Street, Digby
- . Timber house, orchard and mature Oak, 13 Simpson Street
- . Timber shop and residence (former) and orchard, 33 Simpson Street

SIGNIFICANT PLACES:

- . Teacher's Residence (Former), school garden and trees and school gatepost, 36 Bowen Street, Digby
- . Avenue of Honour (World War 1), Clarke Street (Portland-Casterton Road), Digby
- . Avenue of Honour memorial, south-east Clarke & Buckingham Streets, Digby
- . Mechanics Institute and Memorial Hall, 49-51 Buckingham Street, Digby
- . Uniting Church, 3229 Portland-Casterton Road, Digby
- . St. John the Evangelist Church of England and mature trees, 3261 Portland-Casterton Road, Digby
- . Peace Tree in front of St. John the Evangelist Church of England, 3261 Portland-Casterton Road, Digby

Recommended Management

Protect as a Heritage Overlay area under the Glenelg Planning Scheme.

Comparative Analysis

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838 Drik Drik Village Precinct
973 Merino Church and Residential Precinct
979 Condah Township Precinct

Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

The present township of Digby, located on the Portland-Casterton Road, dates from the early 1860s and appears to have pre-empted the closer settlement afforded by the Land Selection Acts by several years. The first buildings were Lewis' Inn and Ottey's General Store, located on the southeast and southwest corners of Clarke and Crawford Streets, both dating from the early 1840s. These and a few other scattered buildings are noted in the plan of subdivision of the land, dated 1852. The town soon developed as a service centre for the timber getting district. There were no mills in the centre of the town, but Eldridge and Rice operated a steam saw mill at Digby from 1862, and many of the timber commercial and residential buildings are constructed of locally milled timber. The important commercial and civic buildings and heritage inventory sites relating to commerce are located in Clarke Street. These include the two churches, the Mechanics Institute, the Digby Hotel, the former Butcher's shop and the site of a number of important archaeological sites. The site of the former State School is located in the south west corner of the precinct, and is a large site with mature plantings. While the school has gone, the teacher's residence and the original school gatepost survive. Digby's fresh water springs is on the western boundary of the precinct. This historic area has a natural fresh water spring within it and was used initially as a source of fresh water, and later as a recreational place. The apparently vacant land along Stokes River is an important archaeological area. Until the 1940s, when a large flood cleared the area, there were a number of crude timber huts located in this area, believed to have been constructed as early as 1841. The huts were washed away in the floods of the Stokes River in the 1940s, but the land retains the potential to yield interesting material. The remainder of the precinct is residential, or residential with several subsistence allotments, traditionally used to keep animals and grow fruits and vegetables. Digby's housing stock follows the three main periods of development within the township - the very early settlement from 1840-1855, of which it appears little or no above ground fabric remains. The second period of development occurred between 1855-1875, when the timber industry expanded rapidly, as the influx of settlers created demand for timber construction in south west Victoria. There are a few examples of small cottages which were constructed in this period, the most intact being 1 Coldham Street, a small timber cottage with a substantial garden surrounding it. The third period of development was the interwar period, between 1918-1939, when a number of small timber shops were built, as well as simple timber dwellings. Many of these survive in varying degrees of intactness. World War One had a devastating effect on the population of Digby and district with almost half of the population enlisted. The Avenue of Honour along Clarke Street was planted to honour those men in August 1917 and is the earliest avenue in the Shire. In addition, a Soldiers Memorial Hall was erected in 1926, with funds raised from the community. Digby's private and public plantings are unique within the municipality. There are many mature specimens of Oak, Pine and Elm on private land within the township. Many of these appear to be between 90 - 120 years old, and are in very good condition. These trees add to the established historic character of the small village. Overall, the precinct retains a high degree of integrity and is in good condition.

How is it significant?

The Digby Village Precinct is of historic, cultural, social and architectural significance to the Glenelg Shire.

Why is it significant?

The Digby Village Precinct is of historic significance as one of the earliest settlements within the municipality. Its contributory elements (including a range of archaeological sites) are varied, and exhibit three distinct phases of development, which co-incide with pastoral and industrial development throughout the municipality. It is of further historical significance to the Shire of Glenelg as one of the chain of small settlements between Portland and Casterton, which developed as the major centres in the area, and for representing the emergence of various aspects of agriculture and timber getting in the area. Another historically significant aspect of the precinct is the layout of the village, and location of buildings which allows us to see a previous way of life, namely the way in which households participated in subsistence agriculture and horticulture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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It is of cultural significance as a predominantly Anglican and Wesleyan settlement, represented in its churches, their associated plantings and memorials. Of further cultural significance is the physical evidence of how the First World War affected the community of Digby, and the way in which the community honoured those who served in conflict. The Avenue of Honour and the Soldiers Memorial Hall are strong indicators of the community's values in this respect. It is of social significance as the focus for the community's education and recreation, roles that continue to the present. The architectural significance of the town lies in a range of commercial, civic and religious buildings constructed from local materials (particularly locally got timber) over a long period of time, ranging from the finer religious buildings through to the humble timber cottages which remain

Recommendations 2006

External Paint Controls

Internal Alteration Controls

Tree Controls

Fences & Outbuildings

Prohibited Uses May Be Permitted

Incorporated Plan

Aboriginal Heritage Place

Yes
No
Yes Avenue of Honour, Peace Tree (in front of St. John the Evangelist Church), All mature Oaks, Elms and Pines within the precinct
No
No
-
No

This information is provided for guidance only and does not supersede official documents, particularly the planning scheme. Planning controls should be verified by checking the relevant municipal planning scheme.