

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

Name MERINO DOWNS HOMESTEAD COMPLEX
Address 5022 HENTY HIGHWAY, HENTY
Place Type Homestead Complex
Citation Date 2006



52800 Merino Downs Stables Henty 078

Recommended VHR - HI - PS -
Heritage Protection

History and Historical Context

The earliest history of the Merino Downs property, located on Henty Creek near Portland, is associated with the Henty family, Victorian pastoral pioneers. This family played a major role in the settlement of the colony and the establishment of the Australian sheep industry. (Henty Family Papers, Box 119110A, SLV Manuscripts) Thomas Henty (1770-1830), farmer and banker of West Tarring, Sussex, England, arrived in the Portland Bay district in the late 1830s with his seven sons, all of whom had considerable farming skills. (Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol. I, pp. 531-535).

The site of Merino Downs was chosen by Stephen George Henty (1811-1873), an 'enterprising explorer and trader, ship owner, whaler and magistrate. Stephen's younger brother John (1813-1888) was put in charge of Merino Downs but, because of his mismanagement, was moved to another Henty family property. He was the only unsuccessful Henty son. The youngest Henty son, Francis (1815-1889), then took over the management of Merino Downs. Francis was said to be a generous friend and master, who adopted a simple life style and was devoted to his property. His small book, 'History of the First Merino Sheep Imported into Australia', told of his family's pioneering role in the development of the Victorian sheep industry. As early as 1837, Francis brought a number of fine-woolled pedigree sheep from the Henty flock in England to the Portland district. (Henty Family Papers, Box 11911 OA, SLV Manuscripts).

Francis married Mary Ann Lawrence (1819-1881), daughter of William Lawrence of Tasmania. They had four children, one son, Lawrence Shum (1845-1877), and three daughters, Louisa (1847-1924), Caroline (1849-1914) and Alice (1852- 1932). At first, when the couple went to Merino Downs, they lived in a 'sod hut' but in about 1843 built a small timber homestead on the property. This old homestead no longer exists but much of the major

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

planting of its surrounding garden survives. It was probably similar to nearby Runnymede Homestead, much of which dates from the same period. Francis and Mary Ann became notable in the district for their hospitality. (Historic Souvenir of the Back to Merino and Henry Centenary Celebrations, c1984, pp. 15, 16, 43).

In February 1848, Francis Henty applied for a lease of the Merino Downs pastoral run, which by this time covered about 24,000 acres and held 10,000 sheep and 270 cattle. A plan of the property prepared at the time showed the run stretching from the south bank of the Wannon River and bounded on the south by Dwyer's Creek. Francis Henry's homestead block with its large 'Grass Paddock' was indicated on 60 acres of purchased land on the west side of a creek, now known as Henty Creek. (Merino Downs Run Plan 546, PROV). A more detailed plan of the 60 acre homestead block prepared in 1848 by Henry Wade, Surveyor, showed the original homestead, a woolshed and a cultivation paddock beside 'Wort Wort Creek' (Henty Creek). (Plan of Grant of 60 Acres to Francis Henty, 1848, PR M5, SL V Map Room). Based on its location and extensive physical evidence, much of the existing wool shed must be the same as that shown in Wade's plan.

On 12 October, 1855, Francis applied for 640 acres on the opposite side of the creek. Although his improvements, homestead and woolshed, were on the west side of the creek, he was granted the 640 acres on the east side under preemptive right regulations. (Merino Downs Pastoral Run Papers 546, PROV). An 1856 Pre-Emptive Right Plan of Merino Downs indicated the 640 acres on the east side of the creek and on the west side Francis Henty's Homestead, Woolshed, Garden, Cultivation Paddock and extensive Grass Paddock. There were also at least three huts, a stockyard, and a bridge across the creek, linking the 60 acres with the 640 acre PR block. (Francis Henty's Pre-Emptive Purchase 640 acres, Merino Downs, 1856, SLV Map Room).

Another important feature of the early Merino Downs homestead complex was its substantial brick stable block said to have been built in 1866 using bricks fired on the property. (It can be compared with the red brick barn at Muntham, another very early Henty property between Casterton and Coleraine, which is said to date from the 1840s). The historic brick stables survive and are classified by the National Trust. The stables have been described as including a groom's room, loose boxes, and provision for a coachhouse and loft. (Graham Lawrence and Charlone Davis, Graphic Glenelg Shire, 1944 edn., pp. 16, 17). An obituary in the Argus of 16 January 1889, following Francis Henty's death, confirmed his importance not only as a breeder of fine merino sheep but also as a well-known breeder and owner of race horses. (Argus, 16 January 1889).

His only son Lawrence Shum Henty, who was born at Merino Downs, died there in 1877, aged 32, and is buried in the nearby Merino cemetery. After this Francis had a Melbourne residence, Field Place, built in Studley Park Road, Kew. It was named after the Henty family home in Sussex. Although Francis retained ownership of Merino Downs, in later years a number of managers were put in charge of the property. In 1885, Francis joined the family firm, James Henty & Co in Melbourne. This company shipped wool, wheat, whale oil and other merchandise to England. Mary Ann died at Field Place in 1881 and Francis in 1889. (ADB, Vol.1, p.533; Casterton News, 18 Jan 1889; Historic Souvenir of the Back to Merino and Henty Centenary Celebrations, c1984, pp. 15,16,43.)

Probate Papers prepared for the Henty Estate in 1889 described the Merino Downs complex as consisting of a homestead, kitchen, coach house and loft with a stable yard, a chaff house, blacksmith's, butcher's and carpenter's shops and a number of stores. It was reported that there were 25 workmen employed on the property. The station manager, B. W. Widdicombe, was paid 100 pounds per annum, a substantial wage for the time. (Probate Papers, Francis Henty, 1889, VPRS 28 / P, Unit 490, File 39 / 789, PROV).

Following Francis Henty's death, there was a division of his estate (which included the present Merino Downs station) between his three daughters. According to one account, after 1908, 'the station was divided into the properties now known as Talisker, Wort Wort Koort and Merino Downs, the last named being that portion of the original surrounding the old homestead.' Miss Louisa Henty became the new owner of Merino Downs. Much of the Merino Downs land was subsequently subdivided for share farming, Closer Settlement and, after the First World War, for Soldier Settlement. (Historic Souvenir of the Back to Merino Henty Centenary Celebrations, c 1984, p. 10).

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

By the time that Louisa Henty died in November 1924 at Field Place in Kew, the buildings at Merino Downs were listed in her Probate papers as a 10-roomed homestead, overseer's cottage, boundary rider's cottage, house trainer's cottage, men's hut, as well as the butchers', carpenter's and blacksmith's shops. Listed in the 1889 probate records there was also a 'Wooden Wool Shed' with an iron roof; a 'Wooden Stable'; and a 'Brick Two Storey Stable' and a 'Garage and Harness Room'. The station complex also included a stockyard and a water tank on a stand. As well as the complex of station buildings, six dairy farms occupied part of the Merino Downs property land under a Share Farming Agreement. Each had a timber house of about six rooms with an iron roof and most had pig pens or pig houses. (Probate Papers, Louisa Henty, 1924, VPRS 28/P3, Unit 1503, File 199/654, PROV).

In early 1925, there was a subdivisional sale of the 'Far-Famed Henty Family's Merino Downs Estate.' This sale was for both stock and land, but did not include the homestead block. (Casterton News, 19 Feb. 1925). Henty family descendants have retained an interest in the historic old property. The current owner, Graeme Henty-Anderson, confirms that, although the old 19th century homestead was demolished in the 1940s, and a number of the earliest buildings have gone, there are still some remaining pre-1924 features in the historic old complex. He also talks about the irrigation hydraulic works on the western side of the Highway.

Remaining buildings include a number of farm structures listed in the Probate inventories prepared in 1889 and 1924 after the deaths of Francis Henty and his daughter, Louisa. Those surviving buildings have considerable heritage value. According to Graeme Henty-Anderson, the present owner of the property, a stable loft, wool store and boot scraper referred to in the 1889 inventory records remain, but the early brick kitchen has gone. There was no listing in 1889 of the two-storey brick stables, reputedly built in the 1860s, although there was mention of a coach house and stable yard.

The carpenter's, blacksmith's and butcher's shops, listed in both the 1889 and 1924 inventories, and the men's hut, wooden buggy room and implement shed, listed in the 1924 inventory, have gone. However, the Overseer's Cottage (currently occupied by Henty-Anderson) listed in 1924 remains, as well as a chaff house, built reputedly between 1914 and 1924 and now used as an implement shed. Timber stables which may have been associated with the coach house and stable yard listed in 1889 have gone but the two-storey brick stables (discussed above) and a wooden tank stand remain. In addition, although the old stockyard has gone, some of the original fence posts remain. (Graeme Henty-Anderson, pers. comm., 5 December 2005). Recent maps prepared in 1995 for the Country Fire Authority and in 2005 for Glenelg Shire Council confirms that the present Merino Downs farm complex is located still on the 60 acre allotment granted to Francis Henty in 1848. (CFA Maps and Rural Directory for South West Victoria, 1995, Map 4290, No.65; Glenelg Shire Council, 5022 Portland-Casterton Road, Henty, Property File 45492265, 2005).

References

The *Argus* 16/01/1889.

The Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB), 1966, Melbourne University Press, Carlton.

Billis, R. V & Kenyon, A. S., *Pastoral Pioneers of Victoria*, 1974. Stockland Press, North Melbourne.

Casterton News, 19 February 1925.

Region 4. South West Victoria, *Map & Rural Directory*, Country Fire Authority (CFA), 1995. Country Fire Authority (CFA), Victoria.

Henty-Anderson, Graeme, Personal Communication 2005.

Henty, Francis, "History of First Merino Sheep Imported into Australia", n.d. Unpublished manuscripts held by State Library Victoria.

Henty, Francis, Probate Papers, 1889. VPRS 28/P, Unit 490, File 39/759, 1889. (PROV)..

Henty, Louisa, Probate Papers, 1924. VPRS 28/P3, Unit 1503, File 199/657, 1924. (PROV).

Back to Merino & Henty Centenary Committee, *Historic Souvenir of the Back to Merino & Henty Centenary Celebrations*, 1984.

Kiddle, Margaret, *Men of Yesterday*, 1962, Melbourne University Press.

Lawrence, Graeme & Davis, Charlotte, *Graphic Glenelg Shire*, 1994 edn.

Victoria and its Metropolis, 1888, McCarron Bird & Co.

Merino Downs Run Plan, 546, 1848. (PROV).

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

Merino Downs Run Papers, 546. (PROV).

Relevant Historical Australian Themes

Theme 3: Developing local, regional and national economies

3.5 Developing primary production

3.5.1 Grazing stock

Theme 5: Working

5.8 Working on the land

Description

Physical Description

Merino Downs Homestead site is located on a gentle slope, looking north east over Henty Creek, a tributary of the Wannon River. The homestead 'paddock' has been fenced off, and although the timber homestead built in the 1840s is long since demolished, a substantial 'skeleton' of the garden survives, with a number of mature trees and unusual bulbs appearing every Spring. The garden is dominated by a mature *Araucaria bidwillii* (Bunya Bunya) which would originally have been located at the front of the homestead. The north east boundary of the site, towards Henty Creek is defined by a hedge of *Crataegus laevigata* (English Hawthorn) mixed with *Crataegus laciniata* (Oriental Thorn) which is planted in a broad sweep, now much overgrown. The garden is a typical mixture of ornamental and practical plants, with several specimens of *Crataegus laevigata* (English Hawthorn) arranged around the area close to where the house was, as well large specimen trees including: *Cupressus macrocarpa* (Monterey Cypress) now removed; *Cedrus atlantica* (Atlantic Cedar); *Fraxinus oxycarpa* (Ash); a variety of different species of *Cupressus* spp.; and *Quercus ilex* (Holm Oak). Other decorative plants which are included are typical of the mid to late nineteenth century. These include *Coprosma repens* (Shiny Leaf), *Nerium Oleander* (Oleander), *Melianthus major* (Honey Flower), *Cercis siliquastrum* (Judas Tree) and a range of bulbs. Most of the bulbs were not in flower at the time of the site inspection, but those species which were included a number of different *Narcissus* sp. (Daffodils), *Nectaroscordum siculum* (Mediterranean Bells), and an unknown *Allium* species.

The remains of an orchard and vegetable garden are located towards the north east boundary of the garden site, with several *Pyrus communis* (Pear Tree) and a *Lauris nobilis* (Bay Laurel) surviving. Several large *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* (River Red Gums) planted to the east of the main garden indicate the route of the previous driveway, which originally linked Merino Downs with the township of Merino over Henty Creek to the east. Under a small gabled iron roof, there is a suspended section of the trunk of an oak tree with a plaque stating 'planted by Francis Henty in 1843'.

The current driveway to Merino Downs dates from the 1920s and includes an avenue inter-planting of *Ulmus procera* (English Elms) and *Corymbia ficifolia* (Flowering Gum). The driveway is 950m long and extends directly from the Portland-Casterton Road entrance to the site of the main yard of the property. There is no pattern evident, and it is thought that the *Corymbia ficifolia* were planted to give some substance to the driveway and protect the *Ulmus procera* until they were larger. It was originally intended that the *Corymbia ficifolia* would be removed, and the driveway be *Ulmus procera* only. Competition, compaction and removal of plant material in the past fifty years, combined with very dry conditions have seen the trees not develop to their expected size or structure.

The woolshed survives from the earliest period of the homestead complex, the oldest, central section on the south side almost certainly dating from the 1840s. The woolshed has three main wings and further additions and yards beyond. The central wing, which is the bottom of its U-shaped plan, is approximately 10.5m by 25m and is comprised of a 'nave' with side aisles. It is framed from adzed, pit-sawn and timber in-the-round, poles, for example, being used for tie-beams. The roof is clad with split timber shingles on closely spaced sawn battens with corrugated iron sheets above, much of which is modern. However, loose sheets of corrugated iron survive in the woolshed which are stamped indistinctly in white paint 'BEST TC [as a monogram surmounted by a crown] BEST

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

/ TUPPER & COMPANY / MANUFACTURERS / LONDON & BIRMINGHAM'. These sheets also have small galvanised iron lugs on the underside. Identical sheets have been seen at the former Caledonian Inn, Sandford which was built in 1854. Other examples by the same manufacturer with a similar but not necessarily an identical stamp are recorded by Miles Lewis: at the Old Melbourne Gaol, commenced in 1853; on a shed at 92 Victoria Street, Eaglehawk and at a barn at Rouse Hill, NSW (Lewis, Australian Building, on-line database). Small sections of the roofing have been replaced with 'Laserlite' to allow more light into the interior. The side or south wall of the central section of the woolshed is very low and is built with vertical timber slabs, approximately 1.2m high, set on a timber plate on a rubble stone base. The end wall is hardwood weatherboards. The main door is a sliding panel of wide vertical boards on a ledge and brace frame. This is off-centre to the left and may be modern. The side door is also ledge and brace construction and clearly much older with beaded edges to the framing and a timber slip rail and housing. Externally, the doors are painted cream and the weatherboards are painted deep red, the only part of the woolshed which is painted. There are modern ramps for loading and off-loading equipment and animals on either side of the main door. The west wing may be almost as old as the central wing. The corrugated iron 'tower' for the wool press is positioned at their junction. The wing crosses the end of the central wing and continues both its profile and form of construction. Its gable is approximately 3.6m wide and there is a further return section of aisle. There are unpainted hardwood weatherboards above the slabs and in the spandrel. Other sections are clad with corrugated iron, particularly the later extensions.. The east wing is approximately 16m by 6m and has a simple gabled roof intersecting with the main roof. It is of later construction and is typically framed and clad with similar weatherboards. The internal holding pens, slat flooring, machinery and other fittings are all typical and survive well with the usual modifications in a working woolshed. The last extensions are for a machinery shed room and, in about 1985, for counting out pens.

There is a very large *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* (River Red Gum), almost certainly remnant vegetation, located near the south-east corner of the woolshed. There is a *Populus nigra* 'Italica' (Lombardy Poplar) located at the north-west corner.

The building incorporating the coach house, loft and stables with a blacksmith's shop in an extension also survives from a very early period. It is one and a half storeys, the upper level being used for storing hay. It is made of soft, locally made bricks which suffer excessively from rising damp particularly at the southern end, which is the blacksmith's shop extension. There is evidence of a lime wash, tinted a light brown, over the bricks. The early corrugated iron roof is a simple gable with a skillion at the rear which has been further extended. The ledge and brace doors, the timber bars on the lower window openings and the timber trellis in the upper windows survive externally as do the usual fittings for horses and carriages internally. The building is reminiscent of the brick barn at Muntham Homestead at Carapook, another Henty property, and the brick coach house and stables at Murndal at Tahara, the property of the Winter-Cooke family.

The overseer's cottage which is included in the 1924 inventory has not been inspected and its significance is not yet determined. The modern house which replaced the original homestead which was demolished in the 1940s is not considered, at this stage, to be of particular significance. There are also modern sheds, barns and tanks within the complex which are not considered to be significant.

Physical Condition

The woolshed is in good condition. The stables, coach house and blacksmith's shop is suffering badly from rising damp.

Usage / Former Usage

Residential and farming

Recommended Management

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

Prepare a comprehensive CMP for the whole place including trees and gardens. Undertake preliminary archaeological surveys of key sites within the Complex. Undertake urgent repairs to the rising damp of the Coach house, stables and blacksmith's shop.

Comparative Analysis

H0289 [Coach House and Stables], Murndal, Murndal Road, Hamilton
H0294 Red Brick Barn [Muntham], 4876 Glenelg Highway, Muntham
H0307 [Shearing Shed] Kout Norien Estate, Harrow-Clear Lake Road, Harrow
H0361 [Shearing Shed] Kongbool, 36 Kongbool Road, Balmoral
990 Runnymede Homestead, 438 Runnymede Road, Sandford

Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

The Merino Downs squatting run, along with Muntham and Sandford, was one of the first three established in the Port Phillip district of New South Wales following the encounter between the explorer, Major Thomas Mitchell, Surveyor General of NSW and the Henty family who were occupying land at what would become Portland. The Hentys proceeded as quickly as possible northwards to occupy the excellent grazing country described by Mitchell as 'Australia Felix': Edward H Sandford (but only until 1847), and Francis Henty (1815-1889), the youngest, at . The brothers also squatted in the Cape Bridgewater area to the west of Portland and had farming, ship-building, and sealing and whaling interests at the Convincing Grounds to the west. Over many years the various brothers came to occupy many other important squatting runs in the Western District of the colony of Victoria after separation from NSW in 1851. Merino Downs and Muntham remained the most important and Merino Downs is the only one still occupied by the family.

Merino Downs Homestead Complex is located on Henty Creek, approximately 80kms north of Portland and 12.5kms south-east of Casterton on the east side of the Portland Casterton Road, Henty. The complex comprises: the new entrance and tree-lined drive; the former homestead site with its extensive garden and mature exotic plantings; the coach house, stables and blacksmith's shop; the woolshed, and the overseer's cottage, as well as the new homestead, various outbuildings and other structures. Other works, specifically for irrigation, are said to survive on the west side of the Portland Casterton Road. John Henty was put in charge of Merino Downs at first but, because of his mismanagement, was moved to Sandford and Francis soon took over. He was a generous friend and master who adopted a simple lifestyle and was devoted to his property. His small book, 'History of the First Merino Sheep Imported into Australia', told of his family's pioneering role in the development of the Victorian sheep industry. As early as 1837, Francis brought a number of fine-woolled pedigree sheep from the Henty flock in England to the Portland district. The homestead block was granted to Francis Henty in 1848. This land was linked to Francis Henty's 640 acre Pre-Emptive Right property on the opposite side of Henty Creek, secured in 1856. Francis married Mary Ann Lawrence (1819-1881), daughter of William Lawrence of Tasmania. They had four children, one son, Lawrence Shum (1845-1877), and three daughters, Louisa (1847-1924), Caroline (1849- 1914) and Alice (1852-1932). Lawrence who was born at Merino Downs, died there and is buried in the Merino Cemetery. Francis Henty ran the Merino Downs property until his death in 1889 when there was a major subdivision of the estate. Then his daughter, Louisa Henty, ran it until her own death in 1924 when it still comprised nearly 5,000 acres. The new drive dates from about this time.

The original timber homestead was begun in 1843, replacing a sod hut and possibly triggered by Francis' marriage to Mary Ann. Presumably there was some sort of subsistence garden begun about the same time. The house was altered and extended over the years along with the increasingly formal garden. Merino Downs, during the occupation of Francis and Mary Ann Henty was renowned for its hospitality. The homestead was demolished in the 1940s and replaced by a new house beyond the original garden's perimeter. The slab woolshed which incorporates much 'bush timber' carpentry must also substantially pre-date the early 1850s, being re-roofed with corrugated iron about 1854. It has been altered and extended but remains a working shed complete with yards and shade trees with a high degree of integrity and in good condition. The stables and coach house probably dates from the 1860s.

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

Substantially intact although badly affected by rising damp, it can be compared directly with buildings at Muntham and Murndal. There are important individual remnant and exotic trees about the complex, perhaps the most important being the remnant *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* and exotic *Populus nigra* beside the woolshed. As well as the former homestead site, there are many other sites of substantial archaeological potential within the property.

How is it Significant?

The Merino Downs Homestead Complex is of historical, social and architectural significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it Significant?

The Merino Downs Homestead Complex is of historical significance for its associations from the late 1830s with the Henty family, pastoral pioneers of the Port Phillip district. Along with their runs Muntham and Sandford (now razed), it was the spearhead of their advance into Major Mitchell's 'Australia Felix'. The Hentys played a major role in the early development of Victoria's sheep and wool industries, as well as early European settlement in the Western District. The site of the Merino Downs complex of farm buildings has particular historical significance as a portion of 60 acres of land on the west side of Henty Creek, and on the south side of the Wannon River, granted to Francis Henty in 1848. This land was linked to Francis Henty's 640 acre Pre-Emptive Right property on the opposite side of Henty Creek, secured in 1856.

The Merino Downs Complex is of social significance for demonstrating the highly respected position in society held by the Henty family. Francis Henty, who ran the Merino Downs property from the 1840s until his death in 1889, and his daughter, Louisa Henty, who owned the property from that time until her own death in 1924, were prominent and popular district residents. Descendants of the Henty family have retained an interest in the property, and it is the only remaining one of the original three properties.

The surviving nineteenth century elements of the Complex are of architectural significance. Although the original homestead no longer survives, its garden does and the whole of that section of the Complex has a high archaeological potential. The woolshed, which adopts a traditional vernacular form and plan, includes the original section which almost certainly dates from the earliest period. It also demonstrates through its sequence of development a continuous use from the earliest period of wool production to the present day. It is directly comparable to many of the earliest woolsheds in the Western District. The brick coach house, stables and blacksmith's shop are also traditional in their form and plan and can be compared with the brick barn at Muntham, another Henty property, and the coach house and stables at Murndal.

Recommendations 2006

External Paint Controls

-

Internal Alteration Controls

-

Tree Controls

-

Fences & Outbuildings

-

Prohibited Uses May Be Permitted

-

Incorporated Plan

-

Aboriginal Heritage Place

-

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.