

# HERITAGE PLACE

**NAME OF PLACE:** HILGAY STATION (FORMER)

**ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE:** Hilgay Road COLERAINE

**STUDY NUMBER:** 041

**HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:**

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**PRECINCT:** Coleraine

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:** Southern Grampians Shire

**ALLOTMENT:** 26 & 27 **SECTION:** 13 **PARISH:** PARISH OF COLERAINE

**ACCESS DESCRIPTION:**

CFA 430 C40 ; VicRoads 72 B4; Located at the termination of the Lower Hilgay Road overlooking the junction of Bryan's Creek with the Wannon River.

**SIGNIFICANCE RATING:** Local



Hilgay, Coleraine façade

**Image Date:** 6/08/02

**EXTENT OF LISTING:**

To the extent of: 1. All the ruined building, the surviving mature trees and the land within a 15m radius from the ruin.

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## **PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:**

The former Hilgay Station consists of a number of bluestone walls, believed to date from as early as the mid-1840s but possibly from the mid-1850s. These are the remains of an early homestead associated with pioneers Arthur Pilleau, the first owner and Alfred Arden, the second. At one stage the homestead consisted of twelve main rooms, of which eight were timber. It is clear from the ruins that the house was sophisticated in its style and form and that it was well built. The plan and appearance of the house can be easily surmised from the ruins and it is well remembered by Mr Noel Vickery who grew up there in the 1930s. The house, which was built at the end of a ridge running south-west towards the junction of the Wannon River and the Koroite Creek, faced south-east across the valley of the Wannon and towards One Tree Hill and the squatting run, Struan. One indication of the early date of the house is that the front windows were treated as French doors. The house was unusual because it was asymmetrical, having two windows on the right side and one window on the left side of the large front door. Chimneys built of brick were located in the side walls. There was a verandah across the façade with stone walls at either end. It was unusual because the hipped slate roof of the house and the verandah were contiguous. The walls were plastered internally and there were lathe and plaster ceilings. The ruined condition of the facade reveals that there was a brick relieving arch over the front door's stone lintel. The rooms immediately behind the two front rooms have been demolished but it seems clear that these, at least were masonry. There seem to have been further rooms in timber forming a service wing. An underground tank survives on the north-eastern side of the house.

The homestead was superseded by a new house, built in front of it, immediately after the Hilgay Estate was sold up for Soldier Settlement in December 1922. Parts of the original homestead are said to have been reused in the new house. The rear section of the original house were later demolished and a corrugated iron shed was built over the foundations which still survive. The new house was demolished in 2002 but the ruins of the verandah, the hall and the two front rooms of the original house remain. Several trees, almost certainly dating from the construction of the homestead, including three Italian Cypresses (*Cupressus sempervirens*), a Monterey Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*), and a Peppercorn (*Schinus molle*) survive immediate to the ruined house.

The remains of the Hilgay sheepwash survive about 1.5kms east of the original homestead on the south side of the Top Hilgay Road. This included water features and a large cast iron pot, since removed. (A similar whaling 'try' or boiling down pot was used at the Audley sheepwash.)

## **HISTORY:**

Hilgay station was first taken up by Arthur Pilleau in 1840 (B&K, 220). It consisted of 9,000 acres carrying 6,000 sheep, plus cattle and horses. Pilleau had arrived at Portland in 1840 and then made his way to Coleraine (B&K, 126). He was the first Justice of the Peace in the area and one of the first streets surveyed in the township of Coleraine was named after him. For a short time Pilleau leased the property to Jonathan Coldham of Grassdale (HS, 8 April 1961). On February 6th 1851, Black Thursday, the whole of Victoria was swept by bushfires. In the Coleraine district only two estates, Winninburn and Hilgay, escaped.

Pilleau sold Hilgay in 1854 to Alfred Arden who had interests in other important properties including The Wilderness, at Gritjurk and Claude Lorraine, at Tahara where he died on 12 January 1892. Arden may have been already managing the run because his obituary notes that he 'was known to have had Hilgay Station about the year 1850' (HS, 14 January 1892). Arden, with his brother George (ADB, Vol 1, 26-7) had arrived in Melbourne in November 1839 (Garryowen, 568). They were the sons of 'Major Samuel Arden, of the East India Co., and belonged to one of the three present English families whose male line can be traced from before the Conquest' (ibid; Burke, 533). George, who went on to become a very colourful character in early colonial society, was one of the founders and editors of the Port Phillip Gazette. Alfred's first position

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appears to have been manager at Sandford, near Merino, one of the Henty's first squatting runs (HS, 14 January 1892).

For a while, Alfred Arden was in partnership with James Fulton, presumably his brother-in-law. He had married Margaret Fulton as a Presbyterian in Melbourne in 1849 (VPI, Reg. No. 2219). She was the sister of Mr Fulton, JP at Merino (HS, 14 January 1892). They had at least five children, three of whose births in 1856, 1856, and 1858 are registered at Coleraine or Hilgay (VPI, Reg. Nos. 9457, 9458, and 13147). The first child, a male born in 1853 and registered in Dundas and who is unnamed, may have died in infancy (Reg. No. 515). The fifth was registered at Merino in 1867 reflecting the family's move from Hilgay (VPI, Reg. No. 23543).

Dr Samuel Connor arrived in Australia in 1882 from Stonyford, Ireland. Shortly after his arrival in Australia, he settled in Coleraine to practice medicine. He met his wife, Florence Arden, Alfred and Margaret Fulton's fourth child and first daughter. They were married in 1883 and had three children between 1885-1888, one of whom (Samuel) died at the age of three, and another, John was killed in active service at Gallipoli in 1915 (VPI Reg. No. 5979; Coleraine Cemetery Index).

Alfred Arden sold his interest in Hilgay in December 1859 to Donald Cameron, one of the most important landholders around Hamilton. He and his family moved to a property purchased under the Land Selection Acts at Tahara which he called Claude Lorraine, after the famous 18th century landscape painter. Arden is reputed to have owned at least two paintings by Claude, which would have hung at Hilgay and which were lost in the fire that destroyed Claude Lorraine in the 1950s (Arden, pers. comm., 20 April 2002). No entries for births, deaths or marriages are registered in Victoria under the name of Pilleau before 1888. So, it does seem likely that the homestead at Hilgay, now in ruins, was built by Alfred Arden to house his wife and family. The house appears to have been built before 1859 on stylistic grounds, for the detailing used and for the indicative age of some of the surviving exotic plants. Arden was a person of taste and education and would have required a respectable residence. The Wilderness did not provide that, being not much more than a rambling timber complex at that time.

Arden was a person with eccentric views for his time. His obituary notes that he 'was of a literary turn of mind, as many years ago he was a constant correspondent of the Spectator on all manner of subjects, and his letters, although full of eccentricities, were read with interest, containing as they often did, opinions and suggestions which give thoughtful men something to ponder over' (HS, 14 January, 1892). His affection and care of local Aborigines may not be so unusual. A woman who died in 1887, aged 46, the daughter of 'Fanny, Aboriginal' and Matthew Winter had the name Barbara Arden (VPI, Reg. No. 14230R). She, and her father, may have assumed the names of the owners and occupants of squatting runs, as was the practice. Arden is said to have spoken 'at least two Aboriginal languages well enough to be understood, which was, of course, a great asset in troublesome times with natives' (HS, 8 April 1961). He left a very unusual will, closely written and corrected in his own hand (copy held). When probate was granted, his estate was valued at 12,488 pounds (HS, 29 October 1892). It included references to the artist Claude and it required all his children to remain on the property, Claude Lorraine and unmarried for them to inherit.

Donald Cameron held at least seven other properties at different times and is more likely to have lived permanently at Mount Sturgeon Plains and its offshoots (B&K, 38). He held the Hilgay licence until it was cancelled in June 1880, a relatively late date for a cancellation. Jonathan (or James) McInnes followed Donald Cameron as owner and he later leased it to Jonathan (or James) Weatherley (HS, 8 April 1961). At this time Hilgay was reduced to 1,600 acres. McInnes was criticised and fined for not destroying thistles under the Thistle Act (ibid). He may be the John McInnes who was born in 1850, died in 1935 and is buried in the Coleraine Cemetery. A Private D McInnes is commemorated on the WW1 memorials in the

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Mechanics Institute and Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Coleraine. By 1912, a W Weatherley is listed as the occupant and the area is given as 6,896 acres (Fawcett, 2003).

T H Laidlaw of Hamilton was a later owner, who finally sold the property to the government for closer settlement, which occurred in December, 1922. [This may not be true, since the Soldier Settlement map published in 1922 mentions the deceased John McInnes.] The station area was subdivided into approximately 20 farms. The Parish of Coleraine was re-surveyed as a result. R J Vickery, who raised his family on the property and farmed sheep, purchased the homestead block. Unwilling to live in the homestead, which had not been occupied for some time, a new house was built immediately in front of it using some materials from the original. The family moved in on New Years Day, 1923.

According to the map prepared for the Soldier Settlement sub-division of the Hilgay Estate in 1922, the woolshed was located 22 chains immediately south of the homestead. Near the woolshed, mens' huts and a chimney with a large oven are also noted and these survived at least until the 1930s (Noel Vickery, pers. comm, 5 August 02). These buildings were on Allotment 27 of Section 13 of the Parish of Coleraine. Hilgay was the first estate in the Coleraine district to introduce machine shearing of sheep, in 1889, when Mr Willis was the owner. Many landed proprietors came to Hilgay during the shearing season to see the workings of the innovation in shearing. The Hilgay sheepwash was situated on the flats bordering the river, about 80 chains due east of the homestead, and a billabong with permanent water was conveniently close by. It is now located on Allotment 31 of section 13 of the Parish of Coleraine. Two stumps, which appear to have been gateposts associated with Hilgay, survive adjacent to the Middle Hilgay Road in the north-west corner of Allotment 15 of Section 13 of the Parish of Coleraine. Where the land rises to form the plateau on the same block there is said to have been a trotting track (Noel Vickery and John and Isobel McGrath, pers. comm, 5 August 02).

The grave of a pioneer woman, Mrs Ward, wife of an employee on the estate, is situated down near the river and is marked by 4 pegs. This must have been very early in Hilgay's history. The Coleraine cemetery was established on land that was originally part of Hilgay when Arthur Pilleau owned it. Lower Hilgay Road was formerly the primary access road to the homestead, and each evening, it is said, Pilleau's staff would ride down to close the cemetery's gates.

Hilgay in recent years has undergone another major change to become a dairy farm.

## **THEMATIC CONTEXT:**

Theme 3: Developing local, regional and national economies

3.5 Developing primary production

3.5.1 Grazing stock

3.5.2 Breeding animals

3.5.3 Developing agricultural industries

Theme 5: Working

5.8 working on the land

## **CONDITION:**

The bluestone walls are in a deteriorated but reasonably stable condition. Much collapsed building material lies inside the front rooms and hall. Footings and foundations survive both in front of and behind the walls still standing. The site retains a very high archaeological potential.

## **INTEGRITY:**

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Very low integrity.

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

What is significant?

The substantial remains of Hilgay Station are located behind a modern house at the intersection (and termination) of the Top and Lower Hilgay Road immediately south of the intersection with Lower Hilgay Road overlooking the junction of Bryan's Creek with the Wannon River and about 10kms south-west of Coleraine. The setting of the original homestead site was deliberately picturesque, capturing broad views in all directions. The original homestead is now in a ruinous condition, but it is clear that it was a symmetrical, single-storey bluestone villa, with a timber front verandah enclosed by wing walls. French doors opened onto the verandah. Other windows appear to have been double-hung sashes. The form, planning, detailing and materials suggest a relatively early date of construction. Substantial plantings appear to have existed around the house. Several trees, almost certainly dating from the construction of the homestead, including three Italian Cypresses (*Cupressus sempervirens*), a Monterey Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*), and a Peppercorn (*Schinus molle*) survive immediate to the ruined house. Arthur Pilleau first took up the squatting run, but it seems that Alfred Arden built the house during his occupation. Arden, of an ancient English family, was one of the first and more unusual squatters in the Western District. From 1859, Donald Cameron owned Hilgay and it appears to have been managed or leased by its owners until subdivided for soldier Settlement in the early 1920s. The house was already derelict by that time. R J Vickery purchased the homestead block and his family moved into a new house, since demolished, built in front of the old at the beginning of 1923. The house is in ruins but retains a high degree of archaeological potential.

How is it significant?

The former Hilgay Station is of historical and architectural significance to the township of Coleraine and the Southern Grampians Shire

Why is it significant?

The former Hilgay Station is of historical significance for its ability to demonstrate a previous way of life, now lost; for its sequence of owners and occupants including the transitions from squatting, to selection, to Soldier Settlement and beyond. It is particularly significant for its connection with the important figure, Alfred Arden.

The former Hilgay Station is of architectural significance as a very early homestead building, dramatically sited with a picturesque sensitivity and an unusual form. The trees which survive from the nineteenth century illustrate typical plant selection and planting style, and provide an understanding of how the homestead would have sat within its immediate landscape as well as the larger Wannon Valley landscape. It remains an important landmark in the landscape of the Wannon Valley.

## COMPARISON:

047 Winninburn Homestead & Woolshed, Heenan-Ferrier Road, Tarrenlea

**ASSESSED BY:** tfh & mgt

**ASSESSMENT DATE:**

5/08/2002

## EXISTING LISTINGS:

## HERITAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Include in VHR  Include in RNE  Include in Local Planning Scheme

No Recommendations for Inclusions

## REFERENCES:

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Douglas Arden	Letter with notes to Timothy Hubbard dated 20 April 2003	2003	
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Noel Vickery	Personal Comments, site inspection, 6/08/02	2002	
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