

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: VILLAGE SETTLEMENT

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Settlement and Portland Road COLERAINE

STUDY NUMBER: 049

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

PRECINCT: Coleraine

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

SECTION: B

PARISH: PARISH OF COLERAINE

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

CFA 430J. Located on the previous Coleraine Town Common, in Section B of the Parish of Coleraine. The area is located approximately three kilometers south of the township of Coleraine.

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: Local

Settler's Cottage, Settlement Road, Village Settlement Area north of Coleraine

Image Date: 10/08/2003

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All the land and all of the buildings located on Section B, Parish of Coleraine.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The Village Settlement is an 1893 subdivision of some 540 acres of land which created 28 farmlets on the southern outskirts of Coleraine. The principal access road is Settlement Road, and about ten houses, dated from the last decade of the 19th century, are scattered along its length. The distinctive features of the Village Settlement subdivision are the circular design of Settlement Road, reminiscent of Garden City design principles, and the proximity of the houses, as the land holdings were small. Many of the farms appear to have been merged in later years to create larger, more economically viable acreages.

HISTORY:

The 1890s depression hit Victoria when the Marvellous Melbourne land boom crashed in 1891. By 1892, banks and building societies were closing, and many companies and individuals went bankrupt, leaving huge debts, most of which could never be repaid. Those building societies that remained denied advances, and without success tried to sell their land into an already depressed and flooded market. The building, mining, and industrial industries ground to a halt and the demand for goods and services declined. Many thousands of Victorians from all levels of society lost their life savings, homes and employment, and the situation compounded by the Government of the day reducing public expenditure, further reducing employment opportunities. Garden (204) states "A dreadful pall of misery, gloom and hardship fell over the colony [Victoria] as the economy spiraled downwards".

There was neither a social welfare system, nor welfare payments available. As a result "...unemployment brought destitution. Even those who found employment were often forced to work for starvation wages in dreadful conditions. Women and children in particular suffered from a revival of sweating in the clothing trade...many women were forced into prostitution; thousands of all ages and both sexes suffered from insufficient clothing and food, from malnutrition and illness. Processions of unemployed men demanding work and assistance met with little more than outward sympathy from the Government" (Garden, 207).

There was a push away from the boom time values of 'Marvellous Melbourne', which had become to many 'Miserable Melbourne', where many idealised life in the country as a utopian paradise. Davidson (251) states that "Men reached...for a rich and active community life; their mood was utopian rather than romantic". It was under the influence of returning to the basic elements of life, such as the bucolic innocence and ideals of the 'Yeoman Farmer' that the idea of communistic Village Settlement Schemes came about in the 1890s (ibid.).

A wide range of people from leaders of commerce to the anarchist left favoured the ideal of a rural co-operative run by a communal society, and took up the idea. Those representative bodies who supporting the Village Settlement schemes ranged from commercial companies, the Co-operative Village Settlements Association, the Affleck-Robertson Association, the Salvation Army, the Rechabites, the Essendon Village Settlement Association and through to individuals, such as Lady O'Loughlen (Davidson, 251).

Davidson (ibid.) states that the most influential these projects was the Tucker Village Settlement Scheme, a concept which was brought into existence by the Rev. Horace Finn Tucker of Christ Church, South Yarra. The Tucker Village Settlement Scheme was a response to the overwhelming poverty and desperation, which he had encountered on his return to Melbourne after some time in country areas. His solution to the crisis being faced in cities was to introduce co-operative rural settlements, where families were placed on government land (such as town commons) and worked co-operatively to clear and work the land which was to be held privately in five acre allotments. The theory behind the village settlements was that by people 'out of town and into the country where they could begin from the beginning', where men would be placed in a rural utopia, and be rehabilitated through their connection with the land. There was also the thought that

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these people could make a living and feed their families from the land. Tucker's "...scheme was heartily welcomed and, within a fortnight, a curiously assorted committee of clergy, charity organizers, politicians and social theoreticians was busily at work translating Tucker's intuitions into concrete plans" (ibid. 252).

Tucker's basic concept may have been what the Presbyterian Church used in the establishment of their Village Settlements, such as that at Coleraine. The Government was quick to adopt the schemes, suggested locations and implementing policy. Garden (1984) states that many of the schemes were presented as being for the 'deserving poor', where they were encouraged to take up small rural blocks in Crown owned areas around Melbourne (ibid.). Other underprivileged or unemployed men were sent to work camps or isolated properties in country areas. As the depression deepened, pressure on Melbourne increased, resulting in more schemes being arranged in areas further from Melbourne. Many rural schemes were supported in part by private charities or church groups.

In September 1893, the Victorian Government through the Department of Crown Lands and Survey decreed that the Wannon Shire Council should set aside 540 acres of the Coleraine Town Common for a Presbyterian Church Village Settlement. The village was to be occupied by the distressed poor from Melbourne and elsewhere. One hundred acres were described as first class land, one hundred as second class, and the rest as inferior land (McGaffin, 32).

The next month, in October 1893 twenty-five settlers with their wives and families arrived unannounced at the Coleraine Railway Station with a few hand tools and seven tents, with the intention to start a new life in the settlement. A report by the Convenor (W. M. M. Alexander) to the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1894 stated "...The new settlers were greeted by the Rev W J Gillespie, Mrs Gillespie and Sergeant McCurdy...." [on arrival]. The townspeople felt that the settlers had not been provided with sufficient supplies and equipment to face the long, often severe winters seen in the Coleraine area (ibid.). Fundraising was organised by local charitable groups, and many local businesses donated goods and food to the people of the settlement.

The townsfolk of Coleraine rallied around the new settlers, and leading citizens provided large amounts of assistance without payment. Adam Turnbull, Shire President, A Johnson of Konongwootong, Mrs. Nicholas of Tahara, Mrs. Stanley of Konongwootong Creek, Ewan Cameron of Struan and Rev Gillespie "greatly exerted and interested themselves in the welfare of the Settlement." Dr Connor provided medical services, Messrs. Turnbull, Templeton, Ferrier, McInnes, Moodie, Peel, Cameron, Laidlaw, McNair, Thornley and Silvester are some of the many residents who donated goods and services. Mr Cooke of Murndal and the State Nursery at Macedon donated ornamental trees, while Mrs Thurman provided drapery, and Messrs. Hewitt and Punshon provided free copies of the "Albion".

Those who had tents were able to establish themselves on the settlement at once, while those without had to find accommodation in the township until they were able to build shelter. A store was built on the settlement to house and distribute the rations provided by the Central Committee, and the settlers worked to remove dead trees and stumps for ease of cultivation, and for firewood. Dams were created to collect water, and fencing materials were purchased from sawmills at Englefield, some 36 miles distant, as no suitable timber was available in the area (CHS Files).

The theory behind village settlements such as that at Coleraine was to put the destitute poor in a position where they could make a home and a livelihood for themselves and their families. It was seen that this in turn would reduce the pressure on Melbourne and the Colonial Government. The aim of the Presbyterian Central Committee (convened by the General Assembly) was "not to pay out small doles, and thus perpetuate the poverty so prevalent". The old Common, on the high ground to the south of Coleraine was chosen

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because it was considered to be of good quality, the settlement close to church, school, doctor etc, and the district around likely to provide some employment for the settlers and their families (CHS Files – Village Settlement). The town common was located to the extreme southern border of the township.

A Parliamentary Report of 1896 states that there were twenty-eight families living at the Settlement, including 109 children; the settlers had 105 acres under cultivation, with an average of 17 acres per man. The scheme was one of 82 ventures to assist the poor in Victoria after the crash and losses of the 1890s, and was described as being the only successful settlement (ibid.)

Despite the reported success of the scheme, it ultimately failed due to the refusal of individual farmers to form the intended co-operative. This meant that some (who had obtained the better land) were able to survive, while those who had taken up the 'inferior' land, or who had very little experience failed, and sought work on surrounding stations in order to survive. By 1894 serious rifts had occurred amongst those individuals who wished to remain independent farmers and the Board of Advice and the Committee of Management. Settlers deserted their lots or were expelled, and local farmers incorporated the blocks of land into their holdings (ibid.).

THEMATIC CONTEXT:

Theme 2: Peopling Australia
2.5 Promoting Settlement

Theme 3: Developing local, regional and national economies
3.5 Developing primary production
3.5.1 Grazing Stock
3.5.3 Developing agricultural industries

3.16 Struggling with remoteness, hardship and failure
3.18 Financing Australia
3.18.4 Cooperating to raise capital

Theme 4: Building settlements, towns and cities
4.1 Planning urban settlements
4.1.1 Selecting township sites

4.4 Living with slums, outcasts and homelessness
4.5 Making settlements to serve rural Australia
4.6 Remembering significant phases in the development of settlements, towns and cities

Theme 5: Working
5.1 Working in harsh conditions
5.1.1 Coping with unemployment
5.8 Working on the land

CONDITION:

A number of the houses appear to have been abandoned, or are in a neglected state of repair.

INTEGRITY:

Low.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

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What is significant?

The former Village Settlement (also known as the Hilgay settlement) is an area of 540 acres of land which created 28 farmlets on the southern outskirts of Coleraine. The principal access road is Settlement Road, and about ten houses, dated from the last decade of the 19th century, are scattered along its length. The distinctive features of the Village Settlement subdivision are the circular design of Settlement Road, reminiscent of Garden City design principles, and the proximity of the houses, as the land holdings were small. The settlement developed as a result of the 1890s depression forcing many city dwellers into rural areas as part of charitable schemes, particularly dominated by the Presbyterian Church. The first and only settlers arrived in Coleraine in October 1893 with no equipment or provisions. The theory behind the scheme was to put the destitute poor in a position where they could make a home and a livelihood for themselves and their families. Many of the townspeople donated food, goods and equipment to assist the settlers in their new venture. The Utopian values of the settlement did not thrive, and although the settlement was considered a 'success', it ultimately failed due to the refusal of individual farmers to form the intended co-operative. This meant that some (who had obtained the better land) were able to survive, while those who had taken up the 'inferior' land, or who had very little experience failed, and sought work on surrounding stations in order to survive

How is it significant?

The Village Settlement land is of historical significance to the township of Coleraine and the Southern Grampians Shire.

Why is it significant?

The Village Settlement is of historical significance as it is a physical reminder of the 1890s depression, and the exodus from cities by the unemployed and their families. The land retains several features which indicate the way in which the residents of the settlement lived, subdivisions which break the land up into small farmlets; primitive buildings; water storage and small cottage garden remnants. These are also historically important as they are representative of those who were able to prosper on the settlement. As a wider representation of a charitable movement, the site is also of historical interest.

COMPARISON:

none in the study area

ASSESSED BY: AEN & TFH

ASSESSMENT DATE: 22/07/2003

EXISTING LISTINGS:

HERITAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Include in VHR Include in RNE Include in Local Planning Scheme

No Recommendations for Inclusions

REFERENCES:

Author	Title	Year	Page
Coleraine Historical Society	File Notes - Village Settlement		n.d
Department of Lands and Survey	Suburban Allotments, Parish of Coleraine, County of Dundas	1873	
Department of Lands and Survey	Parish of Coleraine, County of Dundas	1956	
Don Garden	Victoria: A History	1984	204
G. McGaffin	The Wannon Shire Centenary, 1872-1972: a brief history of the Shire of Wannon	1972	
Graeme Davidson	The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne	1978	251-4
Mardi Stiglich	Personal Communication - July 2001	2001	

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W. M. M Alexander

Report to the Presbyterian General Assembly by W M M
Alexander, Convenor, November 1894

1894