

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: BLACKWOOD HOMESTEAD COMPLEX AND CEMETERY

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Blackwood-Dunkeld Rd PENSURST

STUDY NUMBER: 092

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

**OTHER NAME/S
OF PLACE:** BLACKWOOD HOUSE

PRECINCT: outside

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

PARISH: PARISH OF YALIMBA

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

CFA 475 A7; VicRoads 73 G6; located 7.5 kms north-east of Penshurst, off the Blackwood Dunkeld Rd.

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: State



Blackwood Homestead, Penshurst.

Image Date: 22/02/03

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All the buildings including the woolshed, the original homestead and its curtilage including the remnant garden, the second homestead and its curtilage, the hippodrome and workshop; the third homestead, the stables and garage, and the garden.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

Blackwood Homestead Complex and Private Cemetery are located one kilometer west of the Blackwood-Dunkeld Road, approximately eight kilometers north east of the center of the township of Peshurst. The separate elements of this complex are the original two roomed bluestone homestead, constructed after 1842; a second bluestone homestead built in 1864; a private cemetery; a bluestone and timber woolshed, the current Blackwood homestead, stables and coachouse (constructed in 1891) and four acres of garden and parkland (dating from the same period as the current homestead).

The original Blackwood Homestead was built in the in the mid 1840s, after James and John Ritchie (in partnership with James Scales) took up the original Blackwood run of 35 000 acres in 1842. The homestead was later converted to Peshurst North School.

The second homestead, designed and built by Daniel Ritchie in 1864 as a 'fine stone villa' is much more substantial, eight roomed bluestone villa. It is also constructed of locally quarried bluestone. This residence was never lived in as Daniel died while on a visit to Scotland in 1865. It has been since used as Shearer's quarters.

A private cemetery, located some distance from the current homestead contains several unmarked graves of the Ritchie family, as well as and an obelisk dedicated to James Ritchie, who died in 1857, aged 45 when his horse bolted and threw him against a tree. The private cemetery is surrounded by a bluestone fence with a simple nineteenth century steel and wire gate.

The third bluestone homestead and separate stable block, constructed in 1891 by the leading architectural firm, Butler and Ussher for Robert Blackwood Ritchie are located on a hill top overlooking the surrounding plains with view of the Grampian Ranges a is surrounded. The remains of a nineteenth century pleasure garden surround the homestead. Beyond the homestead garden parkland of exotic specimens has been laid out

The homestead and stables are constructed of local bluestone in the Picturesque Aesthetic style. The homestead, which is situated quite separate to the rest of the buildings, is considered to be unique in its composition for the hip with a long ridge running the entire length of the east elevation. "The south elevation consists of gables, a half hip roof and an observational composition and an observation tower, which combine bluestone in the walls, sandstone for window details, half timbering and plaster to the gable ends, and Major's patent terra cotta tiles from Bridgewater (UK) for the extensive roof and subsidiary gables. The interior is treated in the Jacobean manner and has Dado paneling and strong timber cornice details with paneled ceilings. To the south side of the intimate entrance porch are the principal formal rooms, the hall, the drawing room with a delightful octagonal bay off one corner, the dining room and the billiard room. To the north of the entrance are the more private morning room and bedrooms, which proceed along the east front and return around the north elevation. The service section and servants' rooms are to the west beyond the hall and bedroom corridor such an extended plan is not found in suburban residences of the Melbourne Queen Anne" (Register of the National Estate).

HISTORY:

The land on which the separate elements of the Blackwood Homestead Complex and Private cemetery stand were first taken up as Pre-emptive right P.B No. 238 by James Scales in 1842, being of 10 000 acres, and able to carry 5000 sheep (Billis & Kenyon). By October 1845, James Ritchie had full control of Blackwood (ibid.), having bought out his partner Scales. However, Kiddle (1967) states that James Ritchie arrived from Scotland in April 1841 with enough money to buy 70 cattle (Kiddle, 139), on arrival "He worked on a station twenty five miles from Melbourne for several months until one of this brothers joined him" (ibid.) It is believed that the brother was John Miller Ritchie. Kiddle states that in November 1842, Ritchie, his brother and James

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Scales purchased the station "on the Deep Creek with 16,000 sheep for 400 pounds. The sheep was [sic] in a shocking state with scab, poverty and foot-rot" (Ritchie Papers, in Kiddle, 139). By 1844 that partnership was dissolved and the Ritchie brothers formed Blackwood from the larger run of Deep Creek, the license being transferred in 1845. There is some confusion regarding the Ritchie's involvement with neighboring Woodhouse. Kiddle (139) states that in 1846 'the brothers parted and became independent holders', inferring that James Ritchie stayed at Blackwood, while John took up the adjacent run, Woodhouse. Billis & Kenyon (130) states that James Ritchie held Blackwood alone from 1845-58 and that he purchased Woodhouse in June 1854 from Adolphus Scales (no mention is made of John Miller Ritchie in reference to either property). Another reference states that "The partnership with James Scales was dissolved in 1844 and Blackwood was divided into Woodhouse and the new Blackwood. James Ritchie took over Blackwood in partnership with his younger brother, John Miller. The family partnership was dissolved in 1846 when James Ritchie became the sole owner of the station. In June 1854, he acquired Woodhouse from Adolphus Scales" (Anon, 29). De Serville (484) does not list John Miller Ritchie as being associated with Woodhouse or Blackwood. His entry states that he is a brother of Daniel Ritchie, who held land at Blythevale and Streatham. It may be that there was no other brother associated with the earliest Ritchie involvement in Blackwood and Woodhouse. It is certainly known that by the time of his accidental death in February 1857, James Ritchie owned both Blackwood and Woodhouse. It is thought that the original two-roomed bluestone cottage, the first Blackwood Homestead (which later became Penshurst North School) was built for James Ritchie, at some time between 1843 and 1858. James Ritchie was buried in the Blackwood Private Cemetery. Although many burials have taken place in the cemetery, the obelisk, which marks the burial place of James Ritchie, is the only headstone, and there is no record of the other burials.

As James Ritchie was unmarried, on settlement of his estate, his brothers Daniel and Simon Ritchie took up the licenses of Blackwood and Woodhouse in September 1858 (Billis & Kenyon, 130).

Ritchie (in Forth (ed.)) states that Daniel Ritchie had been a surgeon in the Royal Navy prior to coming to Australia with his new wife, Janet Roy. Ritchie (ibid., 130) states that 'He assumed the management of Blackwood with his brother Simon, of Woodhouse. At that time Blackwood, a run of 7,244 acres, and Woodhouse were supporting 33,000 sheep'. This statement indicates that either Simon was already managing and residing at Woodhouse when Daniel Ritchie arrived at Blackwood. It may be that the brother who had been in partnership with James was Daniel, not John Miller Ritchie. It seems that the Blackwood continued to be run and managed by Daniel Ritchie, while Simon remained at Woodhouse. This arrangement became formalized in 1860, when the partnership dissolved, and Daniel became sole owner of Blackwood, and Simon of Woodhouse (Billis & Kenyon, 176, 302).

The Blackwood run grew in size, and by 1865 held 16 000 acres of freehold, fenced land, running 25 000 sheep. Daniel Ritchie was an important member of the community, being elected Justice of the Peace in 1860, and elect Chairman of the Mt. Rouse Roads Board, holding office until he was elected Shire President of the newly formed Shire of Mount Rouse after the passing of the Local Government Act in 1863 (Ritchie, in Forth (ed.), 130) The Ritchie family were also heavily involved in supporting religion and education to the area. Mrs. Daniel Ritchie laid the foundation stone of the local Church in 1864 (ibid.), and Daniel Ritchie was responsible for lobbying government to establish the first National School in Penshurst (ibid.).

By 1864, Daniel and his wife Janet had three children, and the two-roomed original homestead became too small. Daniel designed and started construction on a 'fine stone villa'. Prior to its completion, the Ritchie's went back to Scotland to visit family and friends, where Daniel Ritchie died unexpectedly at age 49 (Ritchie, in Forth (ed.)). The second homestead was completed, but as Janet and the children did not return to Australia, it was never used as the intended residence, but instead became a Shearer's quarters.

The executors of the Estate of Daniel Ritchie from 1865 to 1886 operated Blackwood. In 1886 Robert Blackwood Ritchie (eldest child of Daniel and Janet) came of age, and assumed ownership of the property.

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In 1891 and 1892, Robert Blackwood Ritchie placed tender notices for the construction of the current house and stables at Blackwood from the designs of the architects Butler and Ussher. Charles Hosking, contractor was successful in obtaining the contract for building both the stables and residence. File Notes from the National Trust state that the tender accepted for the construction of the house was for 4 790 pounds, 1000 pounds being allowed the contractor for 'old building'. The tender for the stables was for 1 202 pounds (*ibid.*).

The house and stables took 18 months to construct, and was completed in 1893. It is presumed that the gardens were laid out at this time also. The structure of the gardens is simple, and complimentary to the homestead and setting, as it provides a large expanse of lawn in which the homestead is set, looking over the plains towards the Grampians. The homestead garden is separated from the parkland (which covers the slope below the homestead) by a low stone retaining wall, which forms a domestic version of the ha-ha.

Butler and Ussher worked together on a series of designs between 1890 and 1893, many of which are still considered to be outstanding examples of the Picturesque Aesthetic. George Tibbits, in an article titled 'The So-Called Melbourne Domestic Queen Anne' describes Blackwood Homestead as being 'one of the finest 19th century examples' of this type. Ussher went on to work with Henry Kemp, as Ussher and Kemp, a partnership that became an important architectural firm in Victoria until Ussher's death in 1908.

In 1893, Robert Blackwood Ritchie (known as R.B Ritchie) married Lillian Mary Ross, the daughter of prominent pastoralists, William Ross of the neighboring run 'The Gums'. R. B and Lillian had two children, Robert Blackwood Ritchie II (known as Robin) was born in 1894, and Alan Blackwood Ritchie, born in 1895 (Ritchie, in Forth (ed.), 130). In 1897, Lillian died at Blackwood, and R.B took his two young sons to Scotland to be raised by his mother Janet, while he returned to Australia. It is not known whether he lived at Blackwood on his return, as Charles Coldham managed the property from 1897 until his death in 1924 (Ritchie, n.p). During this time, R. B was elected to the Victorian Legislative Assembly as the Western Province representative between 1903-07, and continued to be heavily involved.

In 1916, R.B sold the homestead and 3 800 to James Robertson of Skene, after his eldest son, known as Robin was killed on the Somme in France in World War I in 1916 (Ritchie, n.p). R.B bought his younger son, Alan, to visit Blackwood after the war in 1919, and took joint ownership of the remaining Blackwood land, under the company R. B Ritchie & Son (*ibid.*). Alan returned to England to undertake a Bachelor of Economics from Cambridge University.

Robertson renamed the homestead and land he had purchased 'Coolabah', and moved himself and his family there to live. In 1922, his wife Naomi drowned while swimming, and the following year James Robertson passed away after a debilitating illness. The property was sold in 1924 to Paul Miller, a farmer from Katyil, in the Wimmera. "At that stage the property was in the hands of caretakers after personal tragedies had plagued two previous owners. Paul's mother and sister Annie lived there with him until June 1926 when he married Marion Greenlaw.

Alan Ritchie returned to Australia after graduating in 1924, and in 1927 purchased back the homestead and 3 800 acres which had been sold in 1916. Ritchie concentrated first on improving the pasture and fencing of the property, and was recognized for his innovative farming practices, restoring much of Blackwood's former glory as a pastoral empire. His experimental adoption of seed varieties, stock varieties, tree planting, electric fencing and experimenting with different plantings for stock shelter and his innovative approach to farming led to his appointment in 1950 to the CSIRO Executive, where he remained until 1956 (Ritchie, in Forth (ed.), 129).

Alan Ritchie married a Canadian woman, Margaret Witcomb, having met her in London on a three year absence from Blackwood. They had four children, Robin, Judith, Blyth and Linton between 1937 and 1946. When their eldest son, Robin, married in 1965, Alan and Margaret left Blackwood. The property remains in the Ritchie

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family today.

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

Theme 9: Marking the phases of life

9.7 Dying

9.7.1 Dealing with human remains

9.7.3 Remembering the dead

CONDITION:

Excellent integrity for the present homestead. The earlier developments have not been inspected.

INTEGRITY:

Very high degree of integrity

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

What is significant?

Blackwood Homestead Complex and Private Cemetery is located on the Dunkeld – Blackwood Road, eight kilometers north east of the township of Peshurst. The separate elements of this complex are the original two roomed bluestone homestead, constructed after 1842; a second bluestone homestead built in 1864; a private cemetery; a bluestone and timber woolshed, the current Blackwood homestead, stables and coachouse (constructed in 1891) and four acres of garden and parkland (dating from the same period as the current homestead). The current homestead and stables were designed by prominent architectural firm, Butler and Ussher in 1892 and constructed within 18 months by local contractor Charles Hosking for Robert Blackwood Ritchie, the nephew of James Ritchie, who took up the Blackwood run in partnership with James Sceales in 1843. The homestead and stables are set in a large simply laid out typical late nineteenth century garden, with a simple perennial plantings immediate to the homestead, large stretches of lawn and curved beds of shrubs, with a carriageway curving through the garden to the front of the homestead, finishing in a circular turning area adjacent to the front of the house. A low stone wall encircles the garden to the south and west, with exotic specimen trees forming a park on the slopes below the homestead.

The original Blackwood Homestead, a simple two-roomed bluestone cottage, is located constructed of bluestone. The cottage is believed to have been built for James Ritchie between 1843 and his accidental death in 1858. The second Blackwood Homestead, a substantial eight-roomed bluestone villa was designed by James Ritchie's successor, his brother Daniel in 1864. The homestead was to house their growing family when they returned from a visit to Scotland in 1864. The second homestead was never used as a residence, as Daniel Ritchie suddenly while in Scotland in 1865, aged 49. The homestead has been used as a Shearer's quarters since the 1870s.

The Private Cemetery contains the unmarked graves of members of the Ritchie Family, and the grave and obelisk erected to James Ritchie, the first Ritchie of Blackwood. The Private Cemetery is a small area of land enclosed by rough stone walls.

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How is it significant?

Blackwood Homestead Complex and Private Cemetery is of Architectural and Historical Significance to the State of Victoria and the Southern Grampians Shire.

Why is it significant?

The current Blackwood Homestead and Stables of Architectural significance as the best example of the Picturesque Aesthetic as an architectural style in the Southern Grampians Shire. Of further architectural significance are the architects, the influential partnership of Butler and Ussher, who operated from Melbourne in the late nineteenth century. The architectural feature of a long single storey gabled composition of the main building gives a distinctly Australian character to an architectural idiom derived principally from contemporary English works (NER). Blackwood Homestead complex is of historical significance as it demonstrates three separate homesteads which were built as demonstrations of the increasing pastoral fortunes of the Ritchie family. Further historical importance is attached to the complex for the long association with the Ritchie family, many of whom are buried in the private cemetery.

COMPARISON:

023 Murndal Homestead, Mundal Rd, Wannon
037 Tulse Hill Homestead, Carapook Rd, Carapook
117 Nareen Homestead Complex, Coleraine-Nareen Rd, Nareen

ASSESSED BY: tfh

ASSESSMENT DATE:

29-Oct-01

EXISTING LISTINGS:

Name

Southern Grampians Shire Planning Scheme

HERITAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Include in VHR Include in RNE Include in Local Planning Scheme

No Recommendations for Inclusions

REFERENCES:

Author	Title	Year	Page
	Register of The National Estate		
Gordon Forth (ed.)	The Biographical Dictionary of the Western District	1998	130
Kiddle, Margaret	Men of Yesterday	1961	48, 139
Paul de Serville	Pounds and Pedigrees	1991	484
R V Billis and A S Kenyon	Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip	1974	var.