

# HERITAGE PLACE

**NAME OF PLACE:** KONONGWOOTONG CREEK HOMESTEAD

**ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE:** Coleraine/Balmoral Road COLERAINE

**STUDY NUMBER:** 119

**HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:**

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**OTHER NAME/S OF PLACE:** MRS STANLEY'S GARDENS

**PRECINCT:** outside

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:** Southern Grampians Shire

**ALLOTMENT:** L44 45 **SECTION:** PS4561 **PARISH:** PARISH OF KONONG WOOTONG  
52-57  
68-71

**ACCESS DESCRIPTION:**

CFA 430 B41 (Bellwyn); VicRoads 72 D3; located on the east side of the Coleraine-Balmoral Road about 4.0kms north of the centre of Coleraine

**SIGNIFICANCE RATING:** State



Konongwootong Creek Homestead, Looking south from Coleraine-Balmoral Road.

**Image Date:** 01/06/02

**EXTENT OF LISTING:**

To the extent of: 1. All gardens, parkland and ruins of the house, outbuildings and irrigation system, and including the drive and the creek down to the boundary with the Coleraine-Balmoral Road.

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## PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

Konongwootong Creek Homestead site and gardens is located four kilometers north of Coleraine. The gardens, encompassing 10 acres, are laid out on the slope of a steep hill to the east of the Coleraine-Balmoral Road, above the Konongwootong Creek. The garden survives as a substantial but abandoned collection of predominantly European trees laid out around the ruined foundations of a large homestead.

The grounds are circular, the perimeter defined by an encircling carriage track and the remains of a *Crataegus laevigata* (hawthorn) hedge. The southern boundary also has a double row of *Cupressus sempervirens* (Italian cypress) planted inside the hawthorn hedge. The northern section of the garden has been laid out as an arboretum dominated by Pine and Cypress species. A park has been set out in the south-eastern part of the garden, with specimen trees planted on a grassy slope down towards the creek. Around the foundations of the house are the remains of flower beds and shrubberies. Some of the remnant plants in this area include *Coprosma repens* (Shiny leaf bush), *Oleander* sp., *Pittosporum undulata* (Sweet Pittosporum), *Quercus ilex* (Holly Oak) and unusually, *Lagunaria patersonia* (Norfolk Island Hibiscus). Although this area is now overgrown and dominated by many juvenile suckers of *Ailanthus altissima* (Tree of Heaven), the *Phoenix canariensis* (Canary Island Palm) which was the central focus of a circular bed survives. Other European trees planted around the homestead foundations include *Quercus robur* (English Oak) *Quercus canariensis* (Canary Oak), and *Shinus molle* (Peppercorn).

The botanical specimens within the garden are mainly coniferous and in fair to poor condition. There is an unusual and very diverse collection of *Pinus* species including *Pinus canariensis* (Canary Islands Pine), *P. radiata* (Radiata Pine), *Pinus pinaster* (Maritime Pine), *P. butea* (Beauty Pine), *P. pinea* (Stone Pine) and *P. halapensis* (Aleppo Pine). A large number of *Cupressus*, *Chamaecyparis* and *X Cupressocyparis* species have been planted within the garden, some of those best represented include *Cupressus macrocarpa* (Monterey Cypress), *C. sempervirens* (Italian Cypress), *C. toroulouosa* (Bhutan Cypress) and *X Cupressocyparis leylandii* (Leyland Cypress), *Chamaecyparis lawsonia* (Lawson Cypress) and *Chamaecyparis funebris* (Funeral Cypress).

Unusually for that period, Australian native plants have been used as ornamental specimens within the garden. There are individual specimens of *Araucaria bidwillii* (Bunya Bunya), *A. heterophylla* (Hoop pine), and *A. araucana* (Chilean Monkey Puzzle) within the conifer arboretum. There are also random specimen plantings of native plants such as *Corymbia ficifolia* (red flowering gum) and *Eucalyptus citradoria* (lemon scented gum).

An early sub-soil irrigation system survives within the garden with intact elements of: dams, copper pipes, channels, brick cisterns and wells. Round brick fresh water tanks and wells survive around the homestead footings. The irrigation system appears to have had a main dam located on a rise to the south-east of the homestead. Water flowed into a smaller dam, and then into a well, or cistern, to be distributed throughout the garden by copper pipes using a gravity fed pressure system. It is not known to what extent the physical fabric is intact below the surface of the garden.

There are also a number of important archaeological sites within the garden. These include the servant's quarters, built around an asphalt courtyard at the rear of the homestead, the gasworks site, located some distance down the slope which may still contain some fabric, the Tennis Court, located to the west of the homestead site, a number of smaller outbuildings, including the ruins of the stables and other small outbuildings beyond the northern extreme of the garden.

## HISTORY:

The Whyte Brothers arrived in the Coleraine area in 1839, where they took up a run of 57 000 acres, called Konongwootong. In 1840, Koroite, Mount Koroite and Dundas runs were carved from Konongwootong. In 1845, Konongwootong Creek, and in 1849, The Wilderness and Melville Forest runs were divided from the original Konongwootong run.

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The pastoral lease for Konongwootong Creek was purchased by John Ritchie in 1845, who within twelve months re-sold the run of 6026 acres (with the 540 acre pre-emptive right around the homestead) to brothers John and William McConochie. The McConochie family had arrived in Australia from Glasgow in 1841, and were one of the earliest in district, first settling at the Grange on what is now the site of Hamilton. They later purchased several pastoral leases within the area, including Spring Vale at Coojar, and Power's Cattle Station (Wando Dale).

William McConochie managed and resided at Konongwootong Creek until his death in 1863 (CA 18/06/74 p.3). It is not known what improvements, if any William made to the property between 1845 - 1863. Some of the oaks may have been planted during this time.

John McConochie was highly respected and revered within the local community, holding the title of Justice of the Peace. He was a member of the Wannon Shire Council for over 10 years and in his obituary, he was described as "one of the foremost leaders in the district...a member of the Church of England and an ardent supporter of the establishment of a railway in Coleraine" (ibid., p.3).

John McConochie obtained the freehold of Konongwootong Creek estate after his brother's death in 1863 (Billis & Kenyon, p. 229). At this time, he built a substantial single storey home on a level rise of Red Bluff Hill, facing north-west over the Konongwootong Creek. It is believed that this house was made of local stone quarried on the property.

John McConochie was a keen horticulturist, and laid out substantial 10 acre gardens on the slope in front of the homestead. The garden was created in a circular shape with the house being located to the far central eastern boundary. It appears that the majority of the mature Pines, Cypress and Oaks were planted by John McConochie between 1863 and 1891, when he and his wife retired to Sydney, selling Konongwootong Creek run to Mrs. Stanley.

Photographs taken at the turn of the 20th century show a fine established garden, surrounded by a picket fence, with a carriage track defining the perimeter. It is evident that there are a large number of specimen trees laid out within lawns, with a particular concentration of coniferous semi-mature trees towards the north of the site. There are clearly shrubs and flowers planted closer to the homestead, and fruit trees. The garden was said to have had numerous hothouses and greenhouses located behind the homestead, a kitchen garden and orchard also.

The designer of the garden, if any, is not known, although the sophisticated layout suggests that a professional may have been involved. It is possible that John McConochie may have laid out the garden himself, as he was considered to be an expert on plants and gardening, and head of the local Agricultural, Horticulture and Pastoral Committee, the Coleraine and District Horticultural Club, and the winner of many prizes at horticultural displays. Victoria and It's Metropolis (Volume 2, p.66) states that "he [McConochie] has devoted much attention to the cultivation of plants and flowers, and the beauty and variety of these render his estate one of the show pieces of the district."

Mrs. Stanley purchased the property from John McConochie in August 1891 for 45 000 pounds (CA 28/08/1891). Mrs. Stanley was originally Frances Sarah Skelet, who married a very successful miner and property investor from Stawell, Mr. Joseph Shilton. She had four children from this marriage, Tom, Fred, Joe & Molly. After Joseph Shilton's death, his widow re-married Captain Stanley and had four children with him, Madge, John, Richard and Norman. Captain Stanley was the son of an Anglican minister, who had served in the British Navy, migrated to Australia, joined the Police force then the Army and rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel Stanley, State Commandant. The Stanley family already owned other property, including a home 'Penola' at Mt. Macedon, and a large home at fashionable seaside resort St. Kilda called 'Hinckley House'.

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According to local historians, Mrs. Stanley built a second story on top of the existing single storey stone homestead. However, this contrasts to the report titled 'Visit to Konongwootong Creek' in the *Western Agriculturist* by Douglas Straight, who stated that [Mrs. Stanley] "has laid out between 8000 and 9000 pounds in pulling down the old house and rebuilding a very much larger one, together with outbuildings, making the residence one of the most substantial and commodious in the whole of the Western District (WA 29/10/1892, p. 6).

The new homestead was very large, containing over 45 major rooms. Both the homestead and the outbuildings were built from local stone in blocks of up to 2 feet thick. All of the stone was quarried on the property, the quarry located some distance from the homestead to the north-west. The architectural style was said to be free classical, the homestead being almost quadrangular in shape. Both the architect and builder were from Melbourne. Mr. Phillip A. Kennedy of Oxford Chambers in Bourke Street was the architect, and the builder was Mr. James Anderson. Mr. John Poole C. E was the clerk of works. The building works were said to have employed over 260 local men between December 1891 and September 1892 (ibid.).

Aside from the homestead, a number of substantial outbuildings were constructed. Servants quarters were built to the east of the homestead, surrounding a central asphalt courtyard "partly embowered with tree ferns" (ibid.). Although no tree ferns now exist, the author may have been referring to *Ailanthus altissima* (Tree of Heaven) with its pinnate, frond-like foliage. This plant still exists in suckering form in the area where the homestead stood.

Several unusual innovations were used at Konongwootong Creek Homestead. Of particular interest are the gas-works and the irrigation system. Douglas Straight describes a primitive gasworks which used sheep tallow to create a vaporized oil gas. The gas was then piped to the kitchen and over 300 gas lights throughout the homestead. There is little remaining above ground, although archaeological excavation may discover more physical fabric. The gasworks are described as being located "a little distance down the declivity, near the kitchen garden" (ibid. p.6).

The ten acre gardens were watered by an ingenious gravity fed system of irrigation. It is thought that this system was updated in the 1890s when Mrs. Stanley made many other improvements to the property. A large dam located on a rise to the south east of the homestead was the primary water storage for the irrigation system. Water flowed into a smaller reservoir and then to a well or cistern, to be distributed throughout the garden, pressured by the gravity of the steep slope. Mention is also made of several subterranean tanks which serviced the homestead, of which, at least one is still intact.

The Stanley family began experiencing financial difficulty in the late 1890s. To raise capital to keep Konongwootong Creek functioning, Mrs. Stanley was forced to sell blocks of land in Melbourne which had been purchased by her first husband (CA, 18/06/1974, p.3). Graham McGaffin (ibid.) notes that the final block of land she sold was a large site in Bourke Street, Melbourne near the G.P.O which was sold to the P.M.G for £145 000.

Some time after this, Mrs. Stanley divided Konongwootong Creek between the four children from her first marriage. Joe's section was named 'Bellwyn' to the south, and Tom's section to the north was named "Warralong". Mrs. Stanley built almost identical homesteads for both sons and their families on these properties. Fred was sent to University overseas. It is not known what became of Molly Shilton, and the other Stanley children, other than that they are all now buried in the Melbourne General Cemetery.

Neither Joe nor Tom were able to survive on their portions of Konongwootong Creek. Finally, the lack of financial return forced Joe Shilton to sell Bellwyn to Claude Palmer, and somewhat later, Tom Shilton sold Warralong also. In 1903, Konongwootong Creek was subdivided and 1419 acres were offered for sale in 67 lots. The lots varied from 6 acres to the homestead allotment including 386 acres. Only 16 lots on the exterior

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of the property sold.

Captain and Mrs. Stanley retired to Melbourne in 1904, abandoning the homestead. It is thought that the Stanley family must have left in a hurry, as children who played in the abandoned homestead recall playing on a grand piano and 'they left clothes in the wardrobes too... beautiful dresses, frocks and things' (CA 28/10/1993, p. 10).

The house was demolished during the First World War, as it was deemed to be structurally unsound. The stone was re-used to build the Grand Central Hotel in Hamilton and to construct an addition to the Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Coleraine. Local people also used many of the timbers and plants from the garden in their own homes and gardens. The garden has had stock grazing on it for almost 100 years, leading to a substantial number of plants being lost from the garden.

The Brumby family now own the land on which Konongwootong Creek Homestead now stands, the site being part of a larger paddock used for grazing stock.

## **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:**

Physical condition is poor but a significant potential remains for archaeological research.

## **INTEGRITY:**

The garden survives relatively intact. The buildings are mostly in ruins down to the foundations. Various hydraulic works survive leading up from the garden to dams and a spring on the hillside above the garden.

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

What is significant?

Konongwootong Creek Homestead site is a large ten acre site on the side of Red Bluff Hill, four kilometers north of the township of Coleraine. The site is roughly circular. There are several different plantings throughout the garden, including an unusually large and diverse conifer collection. Many of the plantings are mature or senescent, and in very poor condition. There is a large amount of dead plant material which is important as a record of species, type and density of planting. The footings of an extremely large homestead and servant's quarters are located in the eastern section of the garden. The ruins of smaller service buildings are located outside the garden perimeter to the north. A rare, gravity fed irrigation system survives throughout the garden, with associated dams, channels, pipes, cisterns and wells. The archaeological remains of a primitive gasworks are located a short distance west from the homestead footings.

How is it significant?

Konongwootong Creek Homestead site is of historical, scientific, aesthetic, and archaeological significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it Significant.

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Konongwootong Creek Homestead site is of historical significance to the State of Victoria as a representation of the rise and fall of the Western District pastoral aristocracy and the decline of pastoral dominance. Historically, it is important for its association with the Whyte Brothers, one of the earliest pioneering squatters in the area, and as a small part of the much larger run Konongwootong. It is of historical significance because of its close associations with the important McConochie family, particularly John McConochie who was heavily involved in the development of Coleraine as a township, and a Justice of the Peace.

Konongwootong Creek is of scientific significance to the State of Victoria for its rare examples of adaptation to harsh climates and remote locations. The development of gravity fed irrigation system complete with reservoirs, channels, cisterns, wells and pipes to adequately water a very large garden is highly innovative and scientifically significant. The archaeological remains of the gasworks are of scientific significance as they are a rare example of a primitive gasworks located on a pastoral homestead site.

Also of scientific significance is the botanical collection which the garden at Konongwootong Creek represents. Such a large and diverse collection is very rare for the period and remote location of the garden. The use of Australian specimen plants within the garden is also uncommon. All of the plant material (surviving or destroyed) within the garden is of scientific significance to the State of Victoria. Rather than representing a typical nineteenth century pleasure garden, the overall shape is unusually circular, and the plantings are in loose genus based groups, indicating an informed, sophisticated and possibly professional approach to plant collection.

Konongwootong Creek Homestead site is of aesthetic significance, as the former homestead was placed within the landscape to see and be seen, creating a prominent landmark, which is accentuated by the circular design of the garden, located on an otherwise bare steeply sloping hill. Also of aesthetic significance for its rarity in nineteenth century gardens is the carriage-way, which encircles the garden.

Konongwootong Creek Homestead is of archaeological significance to the State of Victoria for its important archaeological remains. These remains include the homestead, the kitchen, the servants quarters and courtyard, the outbuildings, the tennis court, the gasworks, the conservatory, the hothouse and all other structures which are either ruinous or demolished. The homestead itself is particularly important as one of the largest, most architecturally important homestead in the Western District. Also of archaeological significance are the ruinous stables and other outbuildings to the north of the garden perimeter.

## COMPARISON:

There are no comparative examples within the study area.

**ASSESSED BY:** aen

**ASSESSMENT DATE:**

01-Jun-01

## 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 Albion	Coleraine Albion - 28/10/1993	1993	p.10
Coleraine Albion	Coleraine Albion -28/08/1891	1891	
Coleraine Albion	Coleraine Albion - 18/06/1874	1874	p. 3
Douglas Straight	Western Agriculturalist - 29/10/1892	1892	p.6

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G McGaffin	'A history of a large station'	1974	June 18, pp. 3- 4
James Smith, ed	The Cyclopaedia of Victoria	1905	547-8
R V Billis and A S Kenyon	Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip	1974	var.