

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: SPRINGWOOD HOMESTEAD COMPLEX

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Brung Brungle Road WANNON

STUDY NUMBER: 126

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

**OTHER NAME/S
OF PLACE:** BONGMIRE

PRECINCT: outside

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

PARISH: PARISH OF REDRUTH

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

CFA 431 C20; VicRoads 72 F4; located at the end of the Brung Brungle Road, about 4.0kms from the township of Wannon, overlooking the Wannon River.

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: State



Springwood Homestead, Wannon. Garden Elevation.

Image Date: 27/03/03

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All the homestead complex including all the original stone cottage and its additions, all the main house, the 1937 cottage (excluding the interiors), the various minor outbuildings and works, the coach-house and stables, the woolshed and the garden and orchard and a 10,000sqm curtilage around the main house.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The main house at Springwood is made up of several major parts reflecting three main periods. The development is shown in the fabric of the building and in documents such as old photographs and a watercolour held at the house. The exact dates and sequence of development are not certain, however.

The simplest and probably the oldest part is the gabled section now used as the kitchen wing and comprising several rooms. This appears to be constructed of brick but may be stone and has been rendered. The gable roof, aligned north to south, is now corrugated iron and appears to have been modified in the early twentieth century. Originally, two hips possibly covered this wing. The floor level is slightly higher than the adjacent parts of the house. The windows are unusual being double-hung sashes, not counterweighted, and divided into six panes by a thick central mullion and horizontally by thin glazing bars. The kitchen wing has been extended on the western side.

Adjacent to the kitchen wing there is a perpendicular wing including the present dining room and further rooms. A short flight of steps leads up from the dining room into the kitchen wing. This wing is still roofed by the original hip roof but it has been integrated into the newer kitchen roof. This wing is built of brick with stone quoins. The windows are double hung sashes. There is a timber verandah on the north (or rear), the east (or garden) and part of the south sides of this wing. The verandah is simply detailed with a pierced frieze, quadrant brackets and posts with basic capitals and bases. Part of the verandah on the north side has been enclosed and is now used as a bathroom. This wing may date from the same time as the front wing.

Perhaps the second wing to be built runs parallel to the dining room wing and incorporates a transverse passage, two rooms, one of which is used as a library, and a central hall. It is still roofed by the original gable roof, which straddles the transverse passage as well as the rooms, and is relatively shallow in its pitch. Part of the roof is still covered with slates. A timber verandah with cast iron decoration has been added on the west (or drive) side. There are doors from the passage onto the west and east verandahs. The gables of this wing are cement rendered and carefully detailed in the Italianate style with decorated bargeboards, an oeil-de-boeuf ventilator and a simple cornice to create a tympanum. The roof purlins are exposed in the eaves. The gables are terminated by timber finials. The walls of this wing are face brick.

The front wing appears to have been the last to be added. It too is loosely Italianate in style. It was originally under a hip roof but this was replaced in the early twentieth century by a gable roof with wider eaves and a new gablet over the front door. The gables of this wing are treated as plain half-timbering and have rectangular louvered ventilators. This wing includes two principle rooms either side of the central hall. The east room has a polygonal bay window, the roof of which may be original. The west room has a simple double hung sash window, a reproduction of the original windows, which had been removed when the opening was closed. The façade is symmetrical about the front door with a pair of triple-light double hung sashes. Smooth Tuscan 'piers' support an arch of vermiculated voussoirs. These are made from cement render and match the quoins and voussoirs of the adjacent windows. The front entrance is treated as a slightly projecting porch with the door recessed. The front door has leadlight typical of the early twentieth century. The chimneys of this wing are opposite the façade suggesting that they replaced windows if the south face of the library wing was once the façade. The east verandah continues across this side elevation and incorporates a polygonal bay to accommodate the bay window.

Immediately behind the main house there is a small, asymmetrical cottage in the Italianate style. This is built from limestone blocks dressed as ashlar. It has roughcast render in the gables and a simple timber verandah. The windows are double hung sashes. It is said to date from 1937. An earlier cottage appears to have existed in the same position according to the watercolour of the property kept at Springwood.

On the west side of the drive there is a meat house of split weatherboards. It has trellis ventilators in the gables

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of the roof. The roof is covered in corrugated iron laid horizontally. There are other minor works in the garden and other areas around the house. Beyond the homestead garden there is a conventional timber coach-house and stables.

Some distance beyond the stables and on the other side of the drive, there is a stone cottage. This is almost certainly the original homestead and may date in part to the 1840s. The cottage is located close to edge of the valley and looks towards the east. It is symmetrical and single storey and comprises one large room since subdivided by a modern partition. The ceiling is lined with boards, which also line the top of the walls. Otherwise the walls are rough and just painted. The ceiling may be a later alteration. The stone is roughly coursed rubble, which appears to be fieldstone. The roof is hipped and covered with corrugated iron. The windows of this section are now missing but appear to have been casements. There is a large chimney at the northern end formerly used for cooking. It is stone below the eaves line and brick above having been extended. Part of the base has been rendered, perhaps to combat rising damp. A timber wing has been added to the front of the stone cottage. It is longer and wider and has a projecting room on the north side. The windows are twelve paned double hung sashes without counterweights. The roof is gabled in two directions and covered with corrugated iron. A small timber porch has been added at the corner of front door. There is no evidence of an earlier verandah. The timber wing has brick chimneys on the north and south sides. The interiors are lined with painted lining boards, which presumably were covered with hessian and paper. Simple timber mantles survive internally. At the rear of the stone cottage there is what appears to have been a detached timber kitchen or laundry. It is weatherboard, similar to the front extension and is linked to the cottage by a partly enclosed breezeway. The roof is a simple gable.

It seems clear that the main house has been sited on a rise to take advantage of the views across the Wannon River valley. Its plan has developed to create two, if not three, principle elevations. The view from the house to the east or garden side is important because it is the same view enjoyed by the original cottage. The view to the south is also important and this forms the main approach along a winding drive. The current planting, and possibly earlier schemes, enhances the sense of anticipation of arrival along the drive. Tall, mature trees still form a backdrop to the house. The siting and setting of the house follow the well-established principles of the Picturesque aesthetic.

The garden at Springwood is a large roughly oval shaped area of about one hectare with some parts dating from 1870 or earlier. The garden is set close around the homestead, with mature trees planted as shelter on the north west boundary, a large gravelled turning circle to the west of the homestead and densely planted shrubs around the eastern border of the homestead garden. There are also some very early specimen trees planted to the west and north west of the homestead, which may have been grown from seed and planted by William and Mary Mercer in the 1870s. Later plantings include European specimen trees and beds of perennials and shrubs planted adjacent to the homestead.

The garden can be divided into three sections: i) The western half, which has the majority of the historical botanic specimens and has retained much of its integrity; ii) The eastern part of the garden, associated with later developments and the mid to later nineteenth century, although the plantings have been much altered from the original, while the layout retains some degree of integrity; and iii) the orchard and former vegetable gardens, located immediately beyond the eastern border of the garden.

An undated watercolour of Springwood, perhaps painted around the turn of the century shows a substantial vegetable garden and orchard extending down the hillside from the homestead garden, defined by a picket fence. Although the orchard remains in a much reduced state, the only physical evidence of the vegetable garden is a large area of disturbed earth, some of which shows the hummocks where beds were located. The orchard is in fair condition, and contains a variety of species of Apples (*Malus* sp.), Pear (*Pyrus* sp.), Crabapple (*Malus* x domestica), Fig (*Ficus carica*) and Black Mulberry (*Morus nigra*). The watercolour also shows a small wooden gate connecting the homestead and subsistence gardens, set into the fence dividing the two. Although the

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vegetable garden no longer exists, and the orchard is no longer connected with the homestead garden, the gate remains in a newer fence. The original gate serves as a reminder of a previous way of life, and a previous use of the land below. The self-sufficient as well as the ornamental component of the setting contribute to an understanding of the homestead as a complex.

The garden does not appear to have been laid out by a professional designer or architect. The structure is simple and the plantings are relatively common species, known to be available in the nursery trade between 1874–1900. The Mercer (or Messer) family members are likely to have established the gardens with help from gardeners or labourers. The diary of A. A. C Mercer lists a number of seeds, which he had obtained, planted and grown at Bongmire (Springwood) in the 1870s. These included Peppercorn (written "Pepper") (*Schinus molle*); Red and Purple Flowering Gums, written "Red and Purple Flowering Ficifolia" (*Corymbia ficifolia*); Tree Lucerne (*Chamaecytisus palmensis*), an unknown *Hakea* sp., written "Haikca"; Box Thorn written "African Box Thorn" (*Lycium barbarum*?); Canary Island Pine (*Pinus canariensis*); Sugar Pine written "Lambertiana" (*Pinus lambertiana*); White Cypress Pine (*Callytris glaucophylla*); an unknown *Laburnum* species; Kurrajong written "Currajong"; and (*Bachyhiton populneum*) (Mercer). Some of these trees survive in the western part of the garden, including the Red Flowering Gum, Peppercorn, Canary Island Pine and Kurrajong. Other fine specimen trees planted around the turn of the century are also present in the western part of the garden. They include two excellent examples of Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) at the entrance gates to the homestead garden, two Deodar Cedar (*Cedrus deodara*), a Lillypilly (*Syzygium australis*), a *Cordyline australis* (Cabbage Tree), a fine example of a Portugal Laurel (*Prunus lusitanica*) and a substantial Silky Oak (*Grevillia robusta*).

There have been some major alterations to the topography of the garden, including the alteration of the main lawn in the eastern part of the garden, in front of the house. The lawn previously sloped gently towards the Wannon River, overlooking the orchard, vegetable gardens and river flats. Recent alterations have made the lawn extend horizontally from the house, ending in a sharp drop at the further most eastern edge of the homestead garden. This has altered the views from the house and front garden and the appreciation of the borrowed landscape beyond. The view is now toward the opposite side of valley, rather than extending down over the landscape towards the river. The tree line of the opposite plateau is now an important part of the borrowed landscape.

In the twentieth century, a variety of 'popular' plants have been added to the garden. These include the addition of several *Wisterias* (*Wisteria floribunda*) to the verandah on the eastern side of the house and to the entry to the house on the western side. It is likely that these were planted after 1945, although they may have replaced what had been planted before. A number of shrubs and perennials which have been planted immediately adjacent to the house probably date from the latter part of the nineteenth century, as do the Box hedges (*Buxus sempervirens*) which have been used to define spaces within the garden, and emphasise entry points. A number of European specimen trees also appear to have been planted in the latter twentieth century.

HISTORY:

The present property Springwood began as the squatting run called Bongmire. When first established in 1840 as No. 271 in the Portland Bay District, it comprised 15,000 acres or 6,075ha and 8,000 sheep (B&K, 177). Thomas Eady Tulloh took up the license first. In a very rare occurrence, he forfeited the run in the later 1840s because of his behaviour towards the Aborigines and the subsequent disfavour and intervention of Superintendent Charles Joseph La Trobe (Critchett, ??). His relation, Robert William Tulloh, a son of the Laird of Kenzie Castle in Scotland was the first license holder of nearby Bochara (Garden, 14). The Tullohs also upset ordinary folk, according to Don Garden quoting Rolf Boldrewood's *Memoirs* (Garden, 28). Irish immigrants who arrived in Portland in 1841 were hired for a year at 25 pounds each to work on Bochara and Bongmire. When the year was up and they applied for their wages, they were given an order on a business in Portland, which was the usual practice in the District. When they reached Portland they saw Robert Tulloh who gave them new orders less their passage money on Melbourne businesses. When they reached Melbourne the orders were dishonoured and a legal action against the Tullohs' Melbourne agents failed leaving them destitute.

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Again, La Trobe intervened and required the men to be paid.

Stephen George Henty and William Learmonth, both very significant early squatters and in partnership from 1854 to 1863 as Henty, Learmonth & Co, held the Bongmire lease until May 1859. They were friends of Annie Baxter and appear to have supported her during her difficult marriage with Robert Baxter. For a very brief time before 1858 (not mentioned by Billis and Kenyon), and apparently after Henty and Learmonth, Robert Dawbin and his wife, Annie Baxter Dawbin, held the lease of Bongmire (Frost, 1998, xxxviii). The former wife of the infamous Robert Baxter, and a close friend of Rolf Boldrewood, she became a famous nineteenth-century author. The sale was at least in dispute over the number of cattle and may have fallen through. 'Mr Learmonth still persists in not refunding the money which we, otherwise, shall have lost on Bongmire: but offers £300 in compensation! ... We bought the place by Mr Learmonth's cattle books, & gave him 7500£ for 1190 head: now on mustering there were only 910, and on enquiry from Mr Tulloch [sic], the former Owner, we found that such a number were never there! (Frost, 1998, 30, 30n) Annie Baxter makes no mention of William Mercer, the later owner in her journal.

The first substantial homestead was sited on a rise above the River Wannon facing east and about 500m from the present homestead. One unsubstantiated reference suggests that William Mercer, a later owner built the stone hut in 1853 but this is well before his occupation and the building appears to be earlier. It survives although altered and extended. It is important, not only as a rare survivor, but also because of its literary connection. In her journal Annie Baxter Dawbin describes the cottage's inappropriate situation and the squalid condition of the servants in her journal. If the first occupant 'had had but one small atom of taste in his composition, he would have built his cottage and other improvements about a quarter of a mile off, where the river is wide and could have been close to the door: but no! instead of this, he has perched us on top of a hill, overlooking a swamp, and altho' that is pleasantly green even thro' the intense heat of some of our January days, still not a drop of water is to be seen." (Frost, 212) She continues, perhaps betraying some prejudice, 'The cottage is very nice as far as the number of rooms is concerned, but shockingly dirty inside and out. The Servants, a man and his wife, to whom we give £60 a year; and a little girl of 12, to whom I give £12 – are all Irish: and one will see pigs, a kid, fowls and dogs, all issuing from the interior of their– Cabin, I was going to say – but, Hut; and not this only, but the pigs have a fancy when outside the door, of not moving far away, so they have made a sort of hole in front of the Hut where they lie, and where Mrs Haslet, the Servant, throws any kitchen stuff for the dear animals to eat!' After further colourful descriptions, Annie Baxter's final thought was 'how very glad I was that nobody I cared for was likely to be here until I had at least tried to make some alteration in the establishment.'

Then William Cockburn Messer began his long association with the property, holding the lease until December 1872, when it was cancelled. According to the Parish Plan, Messer took out the Pre-emptive Right in April 1860 and purchased much of the surrounding land (DL&S, 1968). It seems likely some of the present house dates from this time but no exact date of construction has been determined nor any association with an architect or builder. Large parts of the 'outer circle' of Hamilton runs including Bongmire were disposed of by the 1862 Land Acts (Garden, 101). Messer, also known by the surname Mercer, was one of the largest non-resident proprietors of land. The family, based in Perthshire, Scotland changed its name from Mercer to Messer and, in 1892, reverted to Mercer (de Serville, 526). James Meikle Messer, William's younger brother, owned Crawford, at Condah (de Serville, 480).

William Cockburn Messer was born in Edinburgh (de Serville, 480). He had married Mary Stewart Anderson, the daughter of Alexander Anderson MD, some time before 1869 but the marriage was not registered in Victoria. They had four children, two girls and then two boys, whose births were registered at Hamilton between 1869 and 1873 (VPI, Reg. No. 22647, 9443, 9351 and 24385). There were at least three other children, one boy and two girls (de Serville, 480). It seems likely that they made their home at Bongmire or Springwood, rather than Nigretta or Kanawalla, since the latter homesteads were inferior in size and construction.

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The second homestead is likely to date at least from 1859 when William Mercer purchased the squatting lease, Henty and Learmonth having their principle residences elsewhere. It may be that the eastern half of the kitchen wing (or more of the present structure now under the 1920s gable) and the central wing with the Italianate gables including the library were built about this time. The next wings to be added appear to be the front wing and the wing behind the central wing. These were united by the verandah, which went around the house from the south-east corner to the kitchen wing. The whole may have been completed in 1869 when the first child was born. No architect or builder has been associated with any of the phases of construction and alteration.

By 1888, William Cockburn Messer is described as owning 32,759 acres or 13,270ha between Hamilton and Coleraine (Sutherland, 57). William spent much of his time travelling and after he died in Scotland in 1889, his executors continued to lease the runs during the 1890s (Garden, 142). Bongmire was run by managers such as Duncan Smith, from 1861 to 1865 (C of V, 549). In 1888, according to the Western District Sheepfarmers Association's 'Notice to Shearers', the run had just sheared 40,000 sheep and had paid 13 shillings per hundred, the usual rate. After Messer's death the three runs Springwood, Kanawalla and Nigretta were held until 1907 by his executors and leased to pastoralists. Then it was decided to sell all three properties (Garden, 162). At that time they comprised 14,500 acres at Springwood, 14,500 acres at Kanawalla and 7,500 acres at Nigretta totalling 36,500 acres or 14,780ha (HHIC, 'Bongmire File'). A plan of the combined estate prepared at the time of the sale survives at Springwood.

The woolshed burnt down in 1908 and was rebuilt. The homestead was painted in watercolour some time in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. The painting is at held at Springwood. It shows the house complete, set in a substantial garden and with a vegetable or kitchen garden on the slope towards the river. The roof of the front wing has not been altered, a change which was made in the early 1920s during the ownership of Alexander Anderson Mercer, the eldest son of William Cockburn and Mary Stewart Mercer. It also shows a small cottage at the rear. The existing cottage on the north side of the house was built for Max and Laurel Mercer, the son and daughter-in-law of William and Mary, to live in when they were married in 1937. The homestead complex remains in the ownership of the Mercer family to the fifth generation.

THEMATIC CONTEXT:

Theme 2: Peopling Australia

2.5 Promoting settlement

2.6 Fighting for land

2.6.1 Resisting the advent of European s and their animals

2.6.2 Displacing Indigenous people

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 main house, the 1937 cottage, the outbuildings, the coach house and stables, the woolshed and the garden are all in good condition. The original stone cottage and its extensions are in fair condition.

INTEGRITY:

Some alterations (not particularly sympathetic) in the 1920s when roofline was changed. Otherwise the main

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house is substantially intact internally and externally. All the other buildings are substantially intact to their historical period. The garden is intact to its mid-twentieth century condition.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

What is Significant?

The Springwood Homestead complex began as the squatting run, Bongmire, which was occupied by the Tulloh family. The run was forfeited because of Superintendent La Trobe's disfavour with the Tullohs over their treatment of Aborigines and of their Irish servants. The oldest building in the complex, a stone cottage dates from the Tulloh occupation and may date from the 1840s. It survives well, although altered and extended. Stephen George Henty and William Learmonth, both very significant early squatters then held the Bongmire lease until May 1859. For a very brief period about 1858 Robert and Annie Baxter Dawbin occupied Bongmire with a view to purchase. She became a famous nineteenth-century author. In her journal she describes the cottage's inappropriate situation and the squalid condition of the servants. The Henty and Learmonth families were close friends and supporters of Annie Baxter. William Cockburn Mercer (also known as Messer) took up Bongmire, purchased the Pre-emptive Right in 1860, built the present homestead and established the garden. The main house is a picturesque assemblage of parts linked by its architectural detailing and by a verandah on two sides. The garden, the orchard, kitchen garden, and the parkland beyond also evolved along picturesque lines with views from the house reaching out and claiming the landscape metaphorically. Another cottage, typical outbuildings, a coach-house and stables, and the 1908 woolshed complete the complex. Mercer became a very substantial landowner after 1860 holding neighbouring Kanawalla and Nigretta, as well. The whole estate was sold up after his death in 1907, but his descendants still occupy the property, now known as Springwood, one of the longer occupations in the Western District. Alexander Mercer altered the main house and garden in the 1920s but the whole complex remains substantially intact, including the interiors, contents and records of the main house, which is in excellent condition.

How is it Significant?

The Springwood Homestead complex is of historical and architectural significance to the Southern Grampians Shire and to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Springwood Homestead complex is of historical significance as an early squatting run. Its connections with early squatters including the Tulloh family, Stephen George Henty and William Learmonth, Robert and Annie Baxter Dawbin, and then from 1859, William Cockburn Mercer (or Messer) and his descendants demonstrate an important sequence of occupation. The original cottage is a rare example of early homesteads made more important because of its description in the journal of Annie Baxter. The later homestead complex is significant as the principle seat of the Mercer family in the past and presently.

The Springwood Homestead complex is of architectural significance for its surviving first homestead, the second homestead with its various accretions and for its setting in a substantial garden and parkland overlooking the Wannon River valley.

COMPARISON:

SSG 0844 Brung Brungle Homestead Complex, Brung Brungle, Wannon

SSG 0936 Nigretta Homestead Complex, Nigretta Road, Nigretta

ASSESSED BY: tfh

ASSESSMENT DATE:

01-Dec-01

EXISTING LISTINGS:

HERITAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Include in VHR Include in RNE Include in Local Planning Scheme

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No Recommendations for Inclusions

REFERENCES:

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Department of Lands and Survey	Redruth County of Dundas	1968	
Donald Garden	Hamilton, A Western District History	1984	var.
James Smith, ed	The Cyclopaedia of Victoria	1905	549
Jan Critchett	A Distant Field of Murder	1990	
Lucy Frost	The Journal of Annie Baxter Dawbin 1858-1868	1998	var.
Lucy Frost	A face in the glass, the journal and life of Annie Baxter Dawbin	1992	212-3
Paul de Serville	Pounds and Pedigrees	1991	480, 526
R V Billis and A S Kenyon	Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip	1974	151, 177