

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: BASSETT HOMESTEAD COMPLEX

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Bassett's Road BRANXHOLME

STUDY NUMBER: 114

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

OTHER NAME/S OF PLACE: BASSET; CRAWFORD

PRECINCT: outside

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

PARISH: PARISH OF BRANXHOLME

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

CFA 472 D-7; VicRoads 72 E7; at the end of Bassett's Road overlooking the Crawford River about 2.0kms west of the township of Branxholme.

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: State



Bassett Homestead, Bassett's Road, Branxholme. Front elevation

Image Date: 22/01/02

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All the homestead building including the interiors, all the outbuildings including those close to the house and the woolshed and men's quarters, the garden and the drive and an area of 10,000sq m around the complex.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The existing homestead at Bassett appears to have been built in three major stages, two in bluestone each with paired, hipped, corrugated iron roofs, and one in brick with gabled terra cotta tiled roofs.

The first section may date from about 1854 when Bassett was sold to John McNicol. Of the two stone sections, it seems more likely that the rear section is the earlier because the addition of the second stage, probably after 1868 when William Skene bought Bassett, now the middle section, blocked off former windows and required the installation of skylights. The opening for original front door was reconstructed to become a deep archway with recessed panels in the arch and paired pilasters supporting its architrave. The detailing of interior of the middle section is finer than the rear. The external detailing of these two sections also differs in that the rear section has heaving rusticated quoins at the corners and around the doors and windows. The detailing of the unusual large shuttered window in the corner office 'pavilion', suggests early construction. At the other end of the rear section a large chimney, in the present kitchen, which suggest that the room has always been the kitchen. This is reinforced by the small rooms forming a pavilion at the other end of the back verandah, now enclosed. The kitchen verandah may be a remnant of a verandah across the original façade. A new verandah was constructed on three sides of the second section, which had paired columns, intriguingly off centre with the second front door. A timber addition of three rooms and passages shown on the existing conditions drawing in 1907, probably the second verandah partly enclosed, has been demolished. The original six paned double hung sash windows of both these sections have been replaced. Some new windows were introduced, probably at the time the third section was added in 1907.

The third section of the homestead is constructed in a hybrid Federation style using dark brown bricks, cement render detailing (now mostly painted white), a timber verandah and French terra cotta tiles. The bricks were made locally in Branhholme at the Wiltshire Brothers kiln. The asymmetry of the projecting gabled window bays and the porch are united by the single main gabled roof. Other features, such as the bijou window, the tall brick chimneys and the timber verandah enhance the picturesque massing of the design. The front door surround is glazed with typical coloured and textured glass in pale pastel shades. The hall chimney breast is interesting for its tapered breast. Importantly, the house is set low to the ground, increasing its informality. There have been timber additions to the side of the verandah, since removed. The whole of the interior appears to have been redecorated because picture rails, typical of the 1900s, have been fitted into the middle and rear sections and some timber mantels were introduced, the one in the dining room being particularly fine. The homestead was renovated extensively again in the mid-1930s. The modernisations included the replacement of several fireplaces, the introduction of a new bathroom and a complete redecoration.

The homestead is approached by a curving gravel drive which opens onto a circular area in front of the façade. The garden is substantial. In 1868 it already comprised 2 acres and there was an orchard. An 1886 description mentions sycamores, Oriental planes, blue gums, and pines of different species. When Bassett was sold in 1925, the garden which appears to have been further developed with the 1907 addition, was described as "splendid".

To the rear and side of the homestead there are several outbuildings all with corrugated iron roofs. These include a weatherboard laundry and a small meat house close to the kitchen door. There is a brick dairy with wide eaves and small windows. Opposite the rear yard there is a small timber building, used as a woodshed, beside a large tank stand. These are both clad with finely corrugated iron. Beyond the rear yard there is a stone building which appears to have been used as a coach house, stable and groom's room. Further away from the house there are more recent sheds and in the far distance the woolshed which, typical in its form and clad in corrugated iron.

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HISTORY:

The squatting run, known as Bassett's Station or Crawford River comprised 70,000 acres located on the Crawford River, adjoining Hotspur, with 15,500 sheep and 60 cattle (B&K, 196). The lease hold was first taken up by Christopher Bassett in July 1842, at which time the Portland Mercury and Normanby Observer both mention that Bassett and Co. were included on a list of depasturing licences. The police found Bassett murdered in August 1843. "Christopher Bassett was a squatter residing at the head of the Crawford River. According to reports he attended his sheep and usually did so unarmed. The Aborigines who murdered him; stripped him of all his clothes drove [sic] pegs in his eyes and speared him through the heart (H.E.P Dana to La Trobe, 6 September, 1843). They also carried off more than 200 sheep. One wonders what Bassett saw or what he was guilty of that he should be treated in this unusual way." (Critchett, 92). It is believed that Christopher Bassett was buried on the rise above the Crawford River west of the Bassett Homestead (Walter, 8).

When Henry Monro (or Monroe) made an application for the pastoral lease in 1847, he requested 70,000 acres which stretched from Hector McDonald's public house (now Hotspur) to Gage and Lang's public house (now Condah), along the banks of the Big Swamp (now Wallacedale) to Best's public house (now Branxholme). This application was granted and, in 1849, Monro took Andrew Rose Cruickshank, a distinguished Melbourne accountant as a partner (Garryowen, 865 & 897). They were in partnership at Crawford, from 1843 to 1849, at Melville Forest from 1852 to 1859; and at Bassett, from 1858 to 1862. Monro was the son of a Prof. Monro of Edinburgh (B&K, 116). He had married a widow, Jane Christie at St James Church, Melbourne in 1841 but she appears to have died the next year (VPI, Reg. No. 4323, 3785). Henry Monro was married again to Kate (or Catherine) Power, this time at the Presbyterian Church in Portland (VPI, Reg. No. 3956). They had a son, David, born at Portland in 1849 (VPI, Reg. No. 45872). They had another son, James Carmichael whose birth is not recorded but who died aged 16 months at Portland in 1855 (VPI, Reg. No. 4977). Monro is not identified by de Serville as a gentleman or otherwise as a man of property. He appears to have managed the properties owned by the partnership.

Cruickshank was a substantial merchant in Melbourne and, from 1856 to 1858, an MLC in the colony's first elected parliament, later becoming president of the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce (De Serville, 385). He is also listed in the 1847 Port Phillip Directory as a merchant in Portland. It would seem that he was an absentee partner at his various properties, perhaps supplying capital and connections in Melbourne and Portland. He had married Catherine Reid in Melbourne in 1842 (VPI, Reg. No. 716) and he married a second time to Elizabeth Rickards in 1857 (*ibid.*, Reg. No. 320). (Although de Serville has him married to an Annie Rickards only, the daughter of Prideaux Rickards, this seems unlikely according to the dates.) No children are registered in Victoria as being born to either marriage. Garryowen describes him as an accountant and tells how he saved a woman's life in 1844 'near Brighton' (Finn, 865 & 897). Cruickshank had other squatting interests: the Wilderness near Coleraine; Crawford near Hotspur; and Whittlebury, near Macarthur (B&K, 53). According to Billis and Kenyon, Andrew Rose Cruickshank died in 1857, aged 37 but his death is not registered in Victoria then. De Serville states that he died in 1889 (de Serville, 385).

A decision was made in May 1854 to subdivide the Crawford squatting run into two parts, to the east an area of 25,000 acres to graze 14,000 sheep called Kangaroo and, to the west, Crawford station, retaining 45,000 acres (Walter, 39). The decision to subdivide Crawford Station further was made in 1858, dividing it in half to create Bassett and Crawford. Monro and Cruickshank kept both properties in their names. John McNicol had purchased the majority of the land of Bassett from Monro and Cruickshank several years before he finally purchased the homestead section and pastoral lease in October 1862. McNicol was already a successful squatter. He was in partnership with a John Smith at Barongarong, near Penola, from 1843 to 1868 and at Fox Hall, north of Casterton, from 1855 to 1868 (B&K, 109). The pastoral lease to Bassett was

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declared forfeit in 1864, and McNicol advertised the property for sale in January 1868. The property at that time consisted of 8,224 acres of freehold land, 2,404 of Crown and other land, it carried 11,000 sheep and 40 cattle.

William Skene purchased Bassett late in 1858 (Halmarick, 77). He became a leading member of the squattocracy having an interest in many substantial properties. In 1853, a street was named after Skene as recognition in the township of Hamilton (although the surveyor Alexander Skene was active in the area about that time). Already one of the former part owners of Pierrepont, 'In 1851 he had purchased Kanawalla and Plains runs north of Hamilton. He lived for a while at Kanawalla but from about the middle of the decade was at Plains which he re-named Warrambeechee. By 1857 he had so risen in status in the town and the district that he was described as "a gentleman who deservedly commands the esteem of all classes of the community" (Garden, 51). In 1858, he sold Kanawalla to his close friend, Thomas McKellar. "The two men were elected within three months of each other in 1870 for the Western Province" (Halmarick, 78). William, who had superseded Stephen Henty, remained in the Upper House of Parliament for six years. He stood again for Parliament in 1892 but withdrew and stood again in 1901 when he was elected as the Member for Grampians, remaining in the Lower House for three years.

When Bassett was put up for sale in 1868, it comprised 10,628 acres of which 8,224 were freehold. The homestead comprised six rooms, which suggests only the rear section had been built by this time. It was set in two acres of garden and there was an orchard. The stable, coach house and woolshed, the latter subsequently replaced, had been built. There is a more detailed description of Bassett in 1875 when it comprised 8,970 acres divided into 24 paddocks. "The improvements consisted of 'a commodious stone dwelling house, consisting of dining room, drawing room, five bedrooms, dressing room, bathroom, offices, pantry, kitchen, servants' rooms and outer offices'. There were also a 'brick stable, coach house, men's hut, farm house, and numerous other buildings, including woolshed and sheep-wash. At that time it was running some 12,000 sheep and 300 head of cattle" (HHC, file). With at least seven principal rooms and five ancillary rooms, the homestead appears to include all those sections in stone which appear in a 'Plan showing existing buildings; drainage etc.' drawn up before the major alterations and extensions completed in

Like most pastoralists, William Skene was an opponent of the Amalgamated Shearers Union in 1887. The first major struggle took place in the district when he was troubled by unionists trying to disrupt his shearing. In preparation for the 1888, shearing season graziers formed the Western District Sheep Farmers Association to counter the union. The leading men in the association included Samuel Winter Cooke, Richard Carty, Peter Learmonth, William Philip, Donald McLellan, John Robertson, and William Skene (Garden, 142 & 147). In the association's notice to shearers in 1888, Skene is not listed at Bassett but at Strathkellar, having 23,000 sheep and offering 13 shillings per one hundred shorn, the average rate.

When William Skene died the property passed into the hands of his son, Thomas for whom it had been purchased (VPI, Reg. No. 1575; Halmarick, 77). Thomas had managed it for his father with his two younger brothers. He continued to breed the Merino flock commenced by his father and introduced a long-wool Lincoln stud. "His interest in sheep saw him as one of the founders of the Chamber of Agriculture, assisting with the preparation of the Flock Book, a bible for sheep breeders in the Western District. He judged both Merinos and Lincoln sheep at the Melbourne and Hamilton Agricultural Society, where he was President in 1877" (Halmarick, 80). In the latter position, he succeeded his father. He also bred racehorses at Bassett, including Fossil which won the 1909 Victorian Grand National Hurdle (Halmarick, 80). Thomas was President of the Royal Agricultural Society in 1891, in 1898 and from 1906 to 1908 (Brown, in Serle, 620). He was a director of the Colonial Bank of Australasia and a director of the Trustees Executors & Agency Co. Ltd.

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STUDY NUMBER: 114

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Halmarick states that "Thomas Skene and his brother David sold Bassett on 1882" (Halmarick, 80). They sold to sisters Elizabeth Brown Moffat and Caroline Arabella Edkins, nee Broughton, possibly because they intended to move to Mexico where Thomas and his brothers had an interest in a large holding like the McKellar and Learmonth families. The Western Agriculturist announced the sale to "Mr. Edkins of Lochiel, near Dimboola, and possession is to be given early as the Messrs. Skene propose to leave for Mexico next month" (WA, 25/3/1882, 4). When he returned from Mexico, he purchased the property Marnoo, west of Rupanyup, where he bred sheep for meat rather than wool. When he and his wife bought a town house, called Branxholme, at Sandringham, Halmarick states that Thomas "still retained the Skene and Bassett stations in partnership with his brothers" but, at least in the case of Bassett, this is contradicted by other sources (Halmarick, 81).

Thomas continued to breed the Merino flock commenced by his father and introduced a long-wool Lincoln stud. "His interest in sheep saw him as one of the founders of the Chamber of Agriculture, assisting with the preparation of the Flock Book, a bible for sheep breeders in the Western District. He judged both Merinos and Lincoln sheep at the Melbourne and Hamilton Agricultural Society, where he was President in 1877" (Halmarick, 80). In the latter position he succeeded his father. He also bred racehorses at Bassett, including Fossil which won the 1909 Victorian Grand National Hurdle (Halmarick, 80). Thomas was President of the Royal Agricultural Society in 1891, in 1898 and from 1906 to 1908 (Brown, in Serle, 620).

There is another very detailed and useful description of the run in 1886 in the Hamilton Spectator. The author, who had visited the property many years before when it was owned by John McNicol, contrasts its appearance 'then and now'. "From this gentleman it was purchased by Mr. Thos. Skene, now of Kirkella, in whose possession it remained for many years, till purchased by Messrs. Edkin and Moffatt the present proprietors. The change that has taken place in the character and appearance of the property during the past fifteen or sixteen years could not be possibly imagined by any person unacquainted with its original characteristics" (HS, 26/11/1886). He describes how the landscape was stripped for wattlebark with the strippers required to ringbark a gum or honeysuckle tree for every wattle. The author laments the destruction and the waste. Henry Edkin had made many improvements to the country, however, and was running 14,000 sheep on 8,000 with the chance in the near future to run nearly two sheep to the acre. (This figure is considerably fewer than the 22,000 sheep mentioned in the 1888 notice).

The same article describes the homestead and its setting. "The homestead and its surroundings have undergone as much improvement as the run. The old circular lawn and Cape broom hedges have given way to neatly-kept and well stocked flower beds, which just now are seen to advantage. The plantations of ornamental trees and shrubs is tastefully laid out. The sycamores, Oriental planes, blue gums, and pines of different varieties are growing so rapidly that very shortly the homestead will be completely hidden in a miniature forest. Every possible convenience is provided for the efficient and economical management of the property, and ... as beyond a new woolshed, no further outlay will probably be needed for many years to come" (HS, 26/11/1886). The old woolshed, which had just been saved from fire, had been renovated with the introduction of a Ferrier wool press but this still did not satisfy the author.

Henry Edkins, Caroline Broughton's husband, was a well-respected member of the Hamilton District community. Along with Richard Carty of Brisbane Hill, Edkins was one of the staunchest opponents to the formation of the Amalgamated Shearers Union in 1887. He was a member of the association the graziers formed to counter the union, and acted as a representative of the graziers in the 1888 negotiations between the union and graziers. "In the middle of 1888, negotiations commenced between W. G. Spence, President of the Union, and the association's representatives, Skene, Carty and H. Edkins of Bassett. Agreement was reached on many points but not on the process, and so 1888 was to see a battle. The shearers made considerable advances and forced several pastoralists to adopt union conditions" (Garden, 147). In the

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ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Bassett's Road BRANXHOLME

STUDY NUMBER: 114

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

association's 1888 notice to shearers he is listed as having 22,000 sheep, needing 13 men and offering 13 shillings per 100 sheep shorn, the average price being offered.

Edkin's son-in-law, Joseph Botterill managed the property and took an active part in the life of the township of Branxholme (Walter, 39). Bassett was advertised for "To Let by Tender" in 1895 but the offer was not taken up and Joseph Botterill remained as manager. In 1898, Bassett was sold to a Melbourne solicitor, William Riggall. His daughter and son in law, Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Tully remained on the property for the next 27 years, in this time undertaking many changes and 'upgrades' to the house and garden, such as the addition to the front of the house, added in 1907.

In 1898, Bassett was sold to a leading Melbourne solicitor, William Riggall (Gibbney & Smith, Vol. 2, 214). He was born in Lincoln, England in 1843 and migrated to Tasmania in 1854 with his uncle, Capt. Horton Riggall. After serving his articles with R. W. Nutt, he became a member of the firm Ross and Clarke, in Melbourne in 1862. He was appointed a partner in the firm which became Blake and Riggall in 1874 and he became senior partner in 1888. He died in 1922. He had married Rebecca Braithwaite (or Kirby) in 1870 and they had seven children (VPL, Reg. No. 4340). Their first child, a daughter called Ada and her husband William H. Tully lived at Bassett for twenty-seven years. They made many changes to the house and garden, most importantly the addition across the façade in 1907. This was designed by the leading firm of architects, Reed, Smart & Tappin whose name appears on the preliminary drawing of existing conditions with an outline of the proposed additions as they were built, a copy of which is held at Bassett.

William Tully died in 1925, although his gravestone gives the date 19 August 1926 (Marr, 2002). Frank Armytage purchased the property, which he held until 1937 when it was sold to Mr. and Mrs. M. T. Whiting. Mrs. Whiting was the sister of Mrs. William Goodwin Beggs who, with her husband, owned Koorrong, a property to the north of Branxholme. Both families engaged the fashionable Melbourne architect, Robert Hamilton to modernise their homes (Dawson, pers. comm., 17/8/2002). The interiors of Bassett were changed extensively, by the introduction of new fireplaces, bathrooms and decoration, while retaining important existing features. The Whiting family still owns Bassett.

THEMATIC CONTEXT:

Theme 2 Peopling Australia

2.6 Fighting for land

2.6.1 Resisting the advent of European 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

Theme 5: Working

5.2 Organising workers and work places

5.8 Working on the land

CONDITION:

All the structures are in very good condition.

INTEGRITY:

All buildings have a high degree of integrity to the Interwar period

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

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NAME OF PLACE: BASSETT HOMESTEAD COMPLEX

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What is significant?

Bassett Homestead Complex, located on the Crawford River immediately to the west of the township of Branhholme, was subdivided off the earlier Crawford run in 1847. The original lease was held by Christopher Bassett who was murdered by Aborigines in 1843. The subdivision took his name. The next owners were the partners A. R. Cruickshank, a Melbourne businessman with interests in Portland, and Henry Monro, who appears to have run the property. The property was subdivided again in 1854 when it was purchased by John McNicol. The first section of the substantial stone homestead probably dates from this time. It was sold again to William Skene, one of the most important early squatters who had a strong Scottish background. He founded a dynasty, based on the original run Mount Mitchell near Ballarat and at Skene at Strathkellar, with connections into the most important pastoral families. His son Thomas managed Bassett and was probably responsible for the construction of another wing across the front of the first homestead. It seems to have been conventional and modest. Thomas was a leading figure not just in the District but in Victoria, being a member of Parliament in the Upper and then the Lower House. He was a staunch supporter of Free Trading, Federation and Closer Settlement. Bassett was famous at that time as a sheep stud and for its racehorses. The property passed to Henry Edkins in 1882 through his wife Caroline Arabella, nee Broughton, and her sister. Edkins was an important negotiator in the battle between the pastoralists and the shearers which blew up in 1888. The Edkins sold out to William Riggall, one of the most influential and well respected solicitors in Victoria. He gave Bassett to his daughter, Ada and her husband, William Tully. They were responsible for the grandest addition to the homestead built in 1907 which was designed by the leading firm of architects, Reed, Smart & Tappin, founded by Joseph Reed in the mid 1850s and now one of the oldest architectural firms in the world. Their work is rarely found in the Western District. The next owners, the Whiting family engaged the fashionable Melbourne architect, Robert Hamilton to modernise the house in the mid 1930s. The homestead remains largely intact to this period and is in excellent condition. It is set within a substantial landscaped garden and park, parts of which may date back to the mid-1850s. The complex includes an extensive range of outbuildings all of which retain a high degree of integrity and are in very good condition.

How is it significant?

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

Why is it significant?

Bassett Homestead complex is of historical significance for the death of Christopher Bassett, for its key role in the battle in 1888 between pastoralists and shearers, and for its associations with several very important individuals including: the absentee owners A. R. Cruickshank MLC and William Riggall who were both pastoralists and distinguished professionals in Melbourne; the founder of the Robertson dynasty, William Robertson and his son Thomas Robertson MLC and MLA. It is of architectural significance for its sequence of development through three major stages, including in particular the third stage designed by the leading Melbourne firm of architects, Reed, Tappin and Smart. It remains a substantially intact complex of pastoral buildings focused on the homestead and set within a landscaped garden and park.

COMPARISON:

023 Murndal Homestead Complex and Cemetery, Murndal Road, Tahara
092 Blackwood Homestead Complex and Cemetery, Blackwood-Dunkeld Road, Peshurst
109 Warrayure Homestead Complex, Rudolph's Road, Warrayure
113 Audley Homestead Complex, Branhholme-Byaduk Road,
332 Mount Koroite Homestead, Glenelg Highway, Coleraine

ASSESSED BY: AEN & TFH

ASSESSMENT DATE:

21-Nov-03

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: BASSETT HOMESTEAD COMPLEX

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Bassett's Road BRANXHOLME

STUDY NUMBER: 114

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

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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Paul de Serville	Pounds and Pedigrees	1991	385
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