

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: CLIFTON HOMESTEAD COMPLEX

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Clifton Road HAMILTON

STUDY NUMBER: 118

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

PRECINCT: outside

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

ALLOTMENT: 101 **SECTION:** F **PARISH:** PARISH OF HAMILTON SOUTH

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

CFA 431 F-61, VicRoads 72 G5, located at the end of Clifton's Road, approximately 4.0 km west of the township of Hamilton on the east bank of and overlooking Muddy Creek.

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: State



Clifton Homestead Complex, Clifton Road, Hamilton.

Image Date: 14/12/01

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All the Homestead and surrounding outbuildings, gardens and land.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

Clifton is a large single storey bluestone house located about 10 kilometers west of Hamilton. The house appears to have been built in two stages, with two wings located at right angles to each other. The building is notable for its finely detailed composition. The earlier wing, built by James Mason after he purchased the land in 1854, is a typical four roomed house with a central passage, constructed of coursed rockface bluestone, with a corrugated iron roof. The later wing was probably constructed after Archibald J. Simpson acquired the property in 1896. The later wing is also built of coursed rock bluestone, with a corrugated iron roof. An attached verandah of timber, roofed with corrugate iron extends from the front of the early wing along the side of that structure, and continues across the front of the second wing, to the front entrance, unifying both wings. The large billiard room terminates the second wing, with its projecting gable and bay window. The gable features timber decorations, including curvilinear carved brackets, which are typical of late Victorian architecture. At the rear of the house, various timber sections, including a modern kitchen and laundry have been added at later stages. No architect has been identified as designing either of the wings. The layout and detailing of the second wing suggests that an architect may have been involved. Through their prestigious social connections, the Simpson's would have been familiar with the designs of prominent architects working in the district around the turn of the 20th century.

The interiors of the main rooms of the second wing are characterised by the use of ornate fireplaces, decorative plaster work, timber paneling and a decorative timber ceiling in the drawing room. The billiard room, which contains an Italian marble fireplace has been divided into two smaller rooms during the latter part of the twentieth century.

Several timber outbuildings are located in the grounds beyond the house. These appear to date from the post World War Two period. Due to the recurrence of destructive bushfires, no outbuildings survive from the Mason or Simpson occupancies. A curious stone structure in the back garden may be the remains of a large tank stand damaged in the bushfires of 1901, which destroyed the gardens and farm buildings (HS 09/02/1901).

The beautifully laid out gardens at Clifton have been established by the present owners since the 1980s and contain many unusual exotic specimens. The front verandah of the earlier wing bears three large Wisteria (*Wisteria floribunda*) which are believed to be over 130 years old. The previous garden consisted mainly of trees and shrubs planted after World War Two. Beyond the garden fence, a parkland of exotic trees has been laid out, many mature trees within the parkland date from the Simpson period. photography taken in the early twentieth century indicate that Clifton had an extensive and highly aesthetic garden planted around the house, while juvenile European trees could be seen in the paddocks (*Pastoral Homes of Australia*, 1910).

HISTORY:

The property now known as Clifton was first taken up by James Mason in 1854 as Allotments 4, 5 & 6 of Section IID, Parish of South Hamilton, and Section XVI, Parish of Yulecart, combined as 514 acres (Department of Lands and Survey).

James Mason and his wife Elizabeth (nee Austin) migrated to Adelaide in 1850 with their nine children from Ballymore Parish, County Westmeath, Ireland (HCC File, Clifton). In 1851 they moved to Victoria, and after residing for a period in several places, James Mason purchased the land that would become Clifton in 1854. The following year, Elizabeth died, leaving James Mason to raise thier 12 children. In 1872, the fifth son, Samuel purchased Allotment 3 Section II D, of 101 acres, and shortly after, another 46 acres (Allotment 11 Section 2, Parish of Bochara) was purchased, bringing the Clifton holdings to more than 534 acres (*ibid.*). In 1873 the Mason family purchased 3000 acres at Karabeal, in the Parish of Mokanger, which was named

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The original four-roomed bluestone house with a central passage was built between 1854 and the early 1860s. Although no firm evidence has been obtained, it is likely that the original stone house was built from bluestone quarried on the property. Raggat (HCC File) suggests that a member of the Forsyth family, who were stonemasons at Muddy Creek, may have built the house. Two of James Mason's older children married into the Forsyth family in the early 1860s. The early bluestone house now forms the western wing of the homestead. From the 1860s (perhaps dating from when the stone house was completed) the property began to be known as Clifton. Although there is no clear reason for why the name was chosen, Raggat (HCC File) suggests that it may be an old family land name dating back to earlier generations of Masons. The Mason family were active members of the community, who strongly supported the Anglican Church. Various family members sat on local committees, the local Water Board, the Shire Council and the Pastoral & Agricultural Society.

James Mason sold a part of Clifton (Allotments 4,5 & 6, Parish of South Hamilton) to his sons Thomas, Samuel, James and William in 1872, and as a partnership they ran Clifton until James' death at Clifton on 10th October 1888, aged 86 (ibid.). After the death of James Simpson, it is believed that brothers Samuel and William Mason continued to run Clifton until 1895 when they sold the property of 500 acres (excluding the Yulecart allotment) to Archibald and Mary (nee Robertson) Simpson. Subsequently the Masons resided at their property Eulameet, near Karabeal.

Archibald Simpson was born at The Leigh near Geelong in 1851, the son of the Reverend Archibald Simpson of the Presbyterian Church. Simpson was educated in Melbourne and then worked for five years on Warrambeen station. He travelled in Europe for a time before returning to Australia and taking up a position overseer on a Station in New South Wales, where he remained for four years. He arrived in the Peshurst district in 1885, where he remained as manager for several years. While manager for Mount Napier, he married Mary Robertson of Skene, in 1893. Archibald and Mary Simpson had six children, Thomas Leigh, John Robin, George, Frank Stephen, James Alexander and Mary Robertson (Galway, 2001).

After the Simpson family took up Clifton, much effort went into creation of gardens and parklands beyond the house. A terrible bushfire, which destroyed many homes, raged through the area in 1901, and although the homestead was saved, most of the plantings and outbuildings surrounding the homestead were destroyed. The Hamilton Spectator (09/02/1901) commented "the elms, oaks and lambertianas which surrounded and beautified the property cannot be replaced. The lopped gum trees and flowering shrubs which lent additional attractiveness to the property, were mostly ruined."

The bushfires also had a devastating effect on the rest of Clifton. The Clifton Stud was to become one of the premier Shropshire sheep and Shorthorn cattle studs in Australia. The Shropshire stud was started in 1895, on arrival at Clifton, with a ram and five ewes which were the second importation of their kind in Australia (Pastoral Homes of Australia, Vol. 1, 1910). The Shorthorn stud commenced when breeding stock was purchased from Neil Black's Mount Noorat dispersal sale in 1897. When the 1901 bushfires swept through the area, the Hamilton Spectator described the damage to Clifton: - "Last Monday a fire broke out and destroyed 400 acres grass on his property...the fire on Thursday, which came in an opposite direction, devastated 600 acres. Mr. Simpson also had his woolshed, with Woolpress, 80 bags of oats and barley, cow yards, a sheep shed which he had specially built for his stud flock, and over 50 tons of hay burnt...all the fruit trees were burnt, and a very pretty privet hedge which surrounded the garden was totally destroyed" (HS 09/02/1901).

Simpson restored his property and continued with his stud sheep and cattle, over several years he purchased

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select stock from quality bloodlines throughout Australia and overseas, gradually building a champion pedigree of Shropshire sheep and Shorthorn cattle. The first national recognition of the quality of the Clifton Stud was in 1907 at the Sydney Royal Show, where one of his bulls, 'Bolinda Duke of Derrimut 244th' was named Champion Bull (Pastoral Homes of Australia, Vol. 1, 1910).

By 1910, the holdings of Clifton had grown to 1500 acres (ibid.), and the Shorthorn stud had become recognised throughout Australasia. The property was described as '...an ideal spot for a stud farm, indeed it would be difficult to find a more suitable place for that purpose in Victoria. The homestead, built of bluestone is commodious, with every convenience, and is in every sense a 'home''. The author also notes that planting conducted after the 1901 bushfires were thriving. "...plantations of Pinus Insignis, single specimens of lambertianas, sugar gums Cootamundra wattles. &c., give shelter to the stock, besides adding to the beauty of the place."(ibid.).

Archibald Simpson continued to improve Clifton as his stud grew. In 1912, he purchased the old Violet Creek homestead and 220 acres (ibid., Vol. 2, 1929), and by 1929, he had refined the property to a compact block of about 1200 acres of the best land in the area surrounding the homestead, which was well watered by three permanent creeks.

For some years, only Derrimut bulls were used in the Shorthorn stud, including two prize winners which sired many top-selling progeny. In 1920 the bull Milton's Rufus was purchased from Mr. Anthony Hordern of Milton Park, NSW, and subsequently only bulls from that stud were used at Clifton. In addition to the cattle, Simpson ran a pure flock of Shropshire sheep at Clifton. Clifton produced many champion Shorthorn cattle and Shropshire sheep, which won prizes including championships at the Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney Royal Shows. The offspring of these champions attracted premium prices at stock sales, and many studs benefited by the introduction of Clifton blood (ibid., Vol. 2.).

Apart from grazing activities, Clifton was extensively farmed for crops. Oats and hay were the main crops, but barley and wheat were also grown. Rye grass was cut for hay each year. Other crops included carrots, potatoes, marigolds, maize, kale, rape and peas, mainly to vary the diet of the stud animals. Two teams of horses were kept occupied with cultivation practically all year (HCC File).

Simpson was heavily involved in the Shorthorn Society, being a founding member, Victorian Committee member, Federal Council delegate from the day of its inception until his death. He was also actively involved in the creation of the Herd Book, and a well-known judge at Victorian and interstate agricultural shows.

Several of Archibald and Mary Simpson's six children went on to have distinguished careers, although none of them remained to carry on Archibald Simpson's work at Clifton. Their first child, Thomas (Leigh) Simpson was born in 1895 at Clifton and was educated first at Hamilton and Western District College, and later at Scotch College in Melbourne. He then worked in Ballarat as an electrical engineer. He enlisted in World War One, in the Light Horse Regiment, transferring to become a pilot with 3rd Squadron A. F. C on the Western Front. For his exploits on the front he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Belgian Croix de Guerre. After the war, Leigh went to the property Sazli, at Dunkeld where he remained for many years as a grazier, as well as pursuing an active community life. Leigh Simpson was also the major sponsorship and one of the directors of Ansett Airways Pty. Ltd. in 1936, and maintained a long friendship and directorship with Reg Ansett, the founder of Ansett Airways. Leigh Simpson died at Dunkeld in December 1960.

George (Geordie) Simpson was also educated at Hamilton and Western District College, and later at Scotch

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College in Melbourne. He went on to study Medicine, and became a leading Collins Street Gynecologist. He was well known throughout Australia for his association with the Rev. John Flynn, of the Australian Inland Mission, and for his pioneering work in establishing the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Dr. Simpson was the medical officer on the first flight of the Royal Flying Doctors Service in 1927 from Cloncurry to Mount Isa. He was awarded an OBE for his services to medicine, in particular for his work at the Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne. He died in November, 1960.

James (Alec) Alexander was educated in the same way as Geordie and Leigh, and went on to study engineering. He moved to Melbourne and successfully continued his career for many years.

Archibald Simpson died at Skene (his wife's family home) in 1940 and the stud was later dispersed. The property was then taken up by J Davey until 1970. Very little information is known regarding the history of the property in the Davey ownership.

In 1970, the Whiting family purchased the property, and from about 1980 the garden has been mainly replanted around the remaining specimen trees and features. In the early 1990s, the timber service wing (built in the 1930s) at the rear of the homestead was demolished. The property remains as a working farm, and the garden is listed on the Open Garden Scheme.

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:

The Homestead in excellent condition, although some of the interiors have been substantially altered in the later twentieth century.

INTEGRITY:

Clifton homestead is retains a good degree of integrity

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

What is Significant?

Clifton Homestead Complex is a large single storey bluestone house, located 10 kilometers west of Hamilton. The house consists of two wings, the first built between 1855-1865 and the later after 1896. The building is notable for its precisely detailed masonry construction and for the integration of the two stages of construction into a unified composition. The exterior and the interior of the later wing are fine examples of late Victorian architectural style and detailing. The attractive garden at Clifton is recent, but the several of the trees in the parkland beyond the garden may date from the turn of the century. The property has had two significant periods of ownership, firstly by the Mason family who ran a substantial pastoral property, and secondly, as the internationally recognised Clifton Shorthorn stud, associated with Archibald Simpson and his family. Two of the Simpson children went on to have distinguished careers associated with aviation, Thomas (Leigh) Simpson was the primary sponsor for Reg Ansett's Ansett Airways Pty. Ltd. in the late 1930s, and a long term director of that company. George (Geordie) Simpson was a leading Collins Street

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Gynecologist as well as being one of the founding members of the Royal Flying Doctors Service in Australia. Clifton Homestead is in excellent condition. The homestead retains a good degree of integrity to the turn of the century.

How is it significant?

Clifton Homestead Complex is of architectural, historical and scientific significance to the State of Victoria and the Southern Grampians Shire.

Why is it significant?

Clifton Homestead Complex is of architectural significance as a fine example of a substantial bluestone homestead of the Western District. It shows a degree of architectural sophistication in the successful blending of the 1890s extension with the 1860s house, and in the elegant finishes to the masonry and decorative timberwork of the extension.

It is of historical significance for its links to the important Simpson family over two generations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Archibald Simpson was a pioneer of the Shorthorn cattle and Shropshire sheep industries, and an exceptionally successful grazier. His wife, Mary, was a member of the important and influential local Robertson family, whose influence on the development of the Western District of Victoria is considerable. Through the Robertson connection, the Simpson's were associated with the earliest phase of development of aviation in Victoria. Clifton was the birthplace of Thomas (Leigh) Simpson, highly decorated in World War One as an aviator, instrumental in the shooting down of Baron von Richtofen, 'The Red Baron' in 1918 over Belgium, thus influencing the outcome of World War One. Leigh Simpson had a distinguished peacetime career, notably as a financial backer for Reg Ansett, and as a lifelong director of Ansett Airways Pty Ltd. Clifton has further historical significance as the birthplace of George (Geordie) Simpson, the third son of Archibald and Mary Simpson, who was associated for many years with Rev. John Flynn, and who was the medical officer on the first flight of the Royal Flying Doctors Service in 1927 from Cloncurry to Mount Isa. Dr. Simpson was awarded an OBE for his services to medicine, in particular for his work at the Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne.

Clifton is of scientific significance as a pioneer stud for Shorthorn cattle, with the development of highly valued bloodlines, which ensured the success of the breed Australia wide. Archibald Simpson's skills as a stud master turned Clifton into one of the most important studs in Australia, with an international reputation for excellence.

COMPARISON:

111 Brisbane Hill Homestead Complex, Port Fairy-Hamilton Road, Byaduk

229 Correagh, Rogers Road, Hamilton

334 Sleat Bank, Murndal Road, Tahara

112 Lyne Homestead Complex, Branxholme-Byaduk Road, Byaduk North

ASSESSED BY: MGT

ASSESSMENT DATE:

14-Dec-02

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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Author	Title	Year	Page
	A Brief History of Beef Shorthorns in Australia	n.d	
	Pastoral Homes of Australia	1929	
Anne Galway	John and Reginald Duigan, Australian aviation pioneers: Genealogy	2001	
Diana M Halmarick, comp.	Thos. Robertson & Sons "Mainstays of Our Earliest Days"	2000	244- 255
Don Garden	Hamilton, A Western District History	1984	var.
Hamilton History Centre	Hamilton History Centre File "Clifton Homestead"		