

# HERITAGE PLACE

**NAME OF PLACE:** HENSLEY PARK HOMESTEAD SCHOOL HOUSE

**ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE:** Hensley Park Road HENSLEY PARK

**STUDY NUMBER:** 363                      **HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:**

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**OTHER NAME/S OF PLACE:** HENSLEIGH PARK

**PRECINCT:** outside

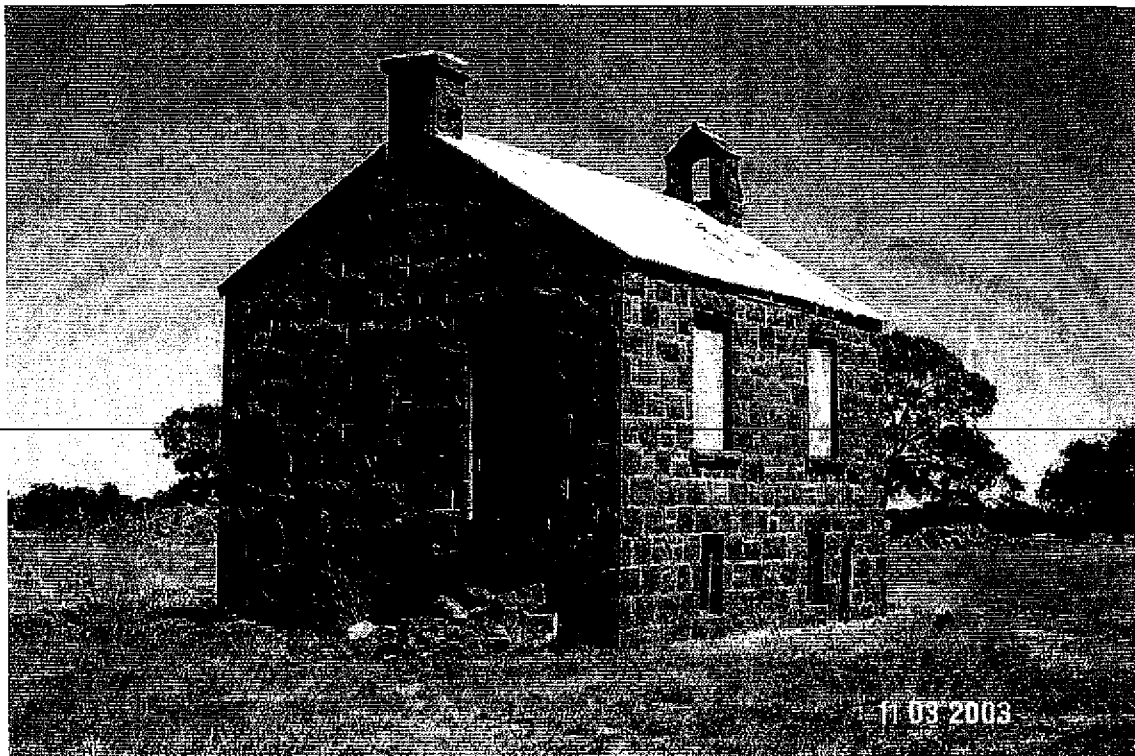
**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:** Southern Grampians Shire

**ALLOTMENT:** 4B      **SECTION:** IX      **PARISH:** PARISH OF KANAWALLA  
(nine)

**ACCESS DESCRIPTION:**

CFA 432 C (near) 10; VicRoads ; located on the east side of Hensley Park Road about 1km from the boundary on a rise with several mature trees around it.

**SIGNIFICANCE RATING:** Local



Hensley Park Homestead Complex, schoolroom

**Image Date:** 13/03/03

**EXTENT OF LISTING:**

The Heritage Overlay Area should be:

To the extent of: 1. All of the school building, including the interiors, and all of the mature trees which surround the school and all of the land within a 50m radius of any edge of the school house.

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## PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

Hensley Park Homestead Complex stands on a rise about 1.2km east of Hensley Park Road between Noske's Subdivision Road and Wensley's Road 15kms north of Hamilton. It comprises the extensive footings of the homestead, with its extensions and alterations, the former schoolhouse, a well, a grove of exotic trees to the east of the homestead and isolated trees some distance from the homestead. The exact location of the men's quarters and woolshed has not been discovered.

The schoolhouse is approximately 4.0m high to the eaves line and 6.0m to the ridgeline and, in plan, 5.0m by 10.0m. The walls are rock-faced bluestone with simple dressings for minor details. The building's form is unusual. It is two stories with a semi-submerged cellar below and a single chamber above. Posts, one of which is missing, and a central beam support the timber floor. Large hooks hang from the beam. Access to the cellar is by a flight of steps on the south side, partly outside and partly inside and off a courtyard. The kitchen was located on the opposite side of the courtyard. Small window openings provide light, although these may have been louvered rather than glazed. Access to the schoolroom by children was through a large timber ledge and brace door on the west elevation, probably reached by timber steps since removed. An arched bellcote surmounts the gable above. At the eastern end there is a standard four-paneled door, reached by stone steps, and a central chimneybreast. There is a pair of windows on the north elevation and a single window on the south elevation, which were probably twelve-paned double hung sashes since removed. Internally the schoolroom is lined with a dado framed in timber with diagonal boards in panels. The upper wall is plastered and lime washed in bright blue. Some graffiti has been scratched into the plaster. The ceiling is coved and treated in a similar way to the dado. Junctions in the framing are highlighted by small turned timber pendentives.

## HISTORY:

Thomas Bromell, MLC, established Hensley Park, originally called Hensleigh Park. The Plan of the Parish of Kanawalla, 1880, shows that he purchased at least 15 allotments, the first two of which were allotment 3A of section 2 and 1B of section 3, both on 4 December 1862. Six more were purchased late in 1869, including allotment 4B of section 9 on which the homestead complex was established. Four more were purchased in early 1870 and the last two in August 1872. His purchases totaled over 1,483 acres (600 hectares) but he must have purchased more from other selectors because Hensley Park came to total some 14,000 acres (5,660 hectares) (Sutherland, Vol. 2, 59). Don Garden writes that "Bromell's rapid emergence as a man of property and influence in the district was reflected by his election to the Shire [of Dundas] Council of which he was President in 1874, and to the Legislative Council in that same year" (Garden, 107).

That Thomas Bromell should rise to such an elevated status, the equal of such men as William Ross of The Gums, Thomas McKellar of Strathkellar, William Skene of Skene and that great pioneer and politician, Neil Black of Mount Noorat says much about the man. He was born in Devonshire, England, had migrated to Victoria in 1852 and after a time on the diggings, turned to farming in the Barrabool Hills (Sutherland, Vol. 2, 59). His daughter recalls that he also carted goods to the gold fields and for station owners, specifically "he carted all the timber and roofing for the first house built at 'Skene' near Hamilton" (HHC, Hensley Park notes). This must have been the 1858 house, still standing but altered and extended, about 7kms south-east of Hensley Park. Presumably, this job introduced Bromell to the country around Skene, which was subdivided for selection and sold from the early 1860s.

When Thomas Bromell died in October 1887, Hensley Park was described as "600 acres in English grass, and 250 acres in cultivation. There was also a comfortable dwelling-house of seventeen rooms, numerous out-buildings, large stable, woolshed, &c., and about 18,000 sheep, 300 head of cattle, 100 horses, and from 60 to 70 Timor ponies depasturing on the property" (Sutherland, Vol. 2, 59). He had sold off 1,000 acres in

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1882-84, but after he died "an attempt to break up the remaining 13,000 acres was largely unsuccessful. Of the twelve blocks into which it was subdivided, only five were purchased" (Garden, 143). That the estate was a mix of sheep and agriculture and that Bromell was a very successful all-round farmer is clear in a quotation in the Hamilton Spectator just before the sale. It states "we may remark that splendid returns were obtained by him from all land he cultivated, as high as 60 bushels of wheat to the acre; equivalent returns in oats and hay, and as fine potatoes as ever were seen from far famed Tower Hill or Mount Eccles" (HHC, Hensley Park notes). The same journalist wrote that "the homestead is not pretentious looking but simply a most comfortable family residence of thirteen rooms, with those very necessary adjuncts, a tastefully laid out lawn and flower garden, a well established and extensive orchard, and vegetable garden."

Only the footings of the domestic part of the complex remain. A rough sketch plan of the house drawn by a descendent of Thomas Bromell shows a rambling complex of rooms. It generally concurs with the footings. The principal rooms look out to Mounts Sturgeon and Abrupt through a grove of exotic trees, the remnants of the formal garden. These include *Araucaria heterophylla*, *Araucaria arcana*, *Pinus pinea*, *Lagunaria pattersonia*, *Cupressus sempervirens*. A perpendicular bedroom wing extending to the east appears to have been added later. These two wings were linked by a verandah. The ruins of a substantial chimney indicate the kitchen. A domed well survives on the south side. Isolated trees, such as *Populus nigra* along the creek and a fruit tree to the north indicate the extent of the garden and larger park.

Only one structure from the complex, a two storey outbuilding, survives. It is known as the 'schoolhouse' and, from its form and detailing, this appears to have been its purpose. The Bromells had many children, seven daughters and one son, another child dying in infancy. There were probably other children on the estate. The bellcote, with its groove well worn by a rope, suggests strongly that the building was a school. The interior of the upper chamber is well finished with a panelled dado matching the coved ceiling, a fireplace and plastered walls. The lower chamber appears to have been used as a cellar or cool room for the kitchen just across a small yard. The journalist writing in 1889, singles out the men's quarters, "at the rear are substantially built bluestone quarters for the men, and a little further away a woolshed providing sufficient accommodation for fourteen shearers." But these may have been some distance away.

Much later, there was a State School at Hensley Park which opened in 1928. It was built on land, which was part of Noske's estate, later called Hensley Park. It was "at first housed in a small weatherboard building erected by the settlers, with the Education Department providing a teacher. In 1945 it was moved to a new building near the Hamilton Hensley Park Road" (Garden, 218).

The Bromell family moved to another property nearby, Illira in 1910 and later established Hensleigh. Subsequently the original homestead fell into decline and the building materials were plundered for works at other places. The schoolhouse was used to store hay and fertilizer. The cellar has been full of water for at least fifty years. It still remains in the ownership of the Bromell family.

## **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

5.3 Caring for workers' dependent children

5.8 Working on the land

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Theme 6 Educating

6.2 Establishing Schools

6.5 Educating people in remote places

**CONDITION:**

Very Good

**INTEGRITY:**

The school building retains a very high degree of integrity, especially for its elaborate interior detailing.

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

What is significant?

The remains of the once substantial Hensley Park Homestead Complex are located in a paddock, on a rise about 1.2km east of Hensley Park Road between Noske's Subdivision Road and Wensley's Road 15kms north of Hamilton. The only surviving structure above ground is a two storey bluestone school room. The walls are rock-faced bluestone with simple dressings for minor details. The building's form is unusual. It is two stories with a semi-submerged cellar below and a single chamber above. Posts, one of which is missing, and a central beam support the timber floor. Large hooks hang from the beam. Access to the cellar is by a flight of steps on the south side, partly outside and partly inside and off a courtyard. The kitchen was located on the opposite side of the courtyard. An arched bellcote surmounts the gable above. Internally the schoolroom is lined with a dado framed in timber with diagonal boards in panels. A stone pine (*Pinus pinea*) and a Bunya Bunya pine (*Araucaria bidwillii*) are located near the school house, as are other mature trees. Thomas Brommell, MLC, established Hensley Park, originally called Hensleigh Park between 1862 and 1872, amassing some 14 000 acres. Brommell was a very well respected man, who rose from humble beginnings as a carrier who carted goods to the goldfields. Hensleigh Park homestead was described as "comfortable dwelling-house of seventeen rooms, numerous out-buildings, large stable, woolshed, &c." at the time of his death in 1887. It is likely that the Brommell family built the school to serve their own seven children, as well as those of the many workman's families which would have worked on Hensley Park. The Brommell family remained at Hensley Park until 1910 when they moved to Ilira. The housing materials from the buildings at Hensley Park were plundered for construction and repairs for other buildings after they fell into disrepair. Many footings still survive. There has been no architect or builder associated with any of the buildings constructed at Hensley Park. The school building is in good condition, although the cellar has been partially flooded for over fifty years. The building retains an excellent degree of integrity.

How is it significant?

The Hensley Park Homestead School House is of historical and architectural significance to the Southern Grampians Shire. The Hensley Park Homestead Complex is of archeological and historical significance to the Southern Grampians Shire as a Heritage Inventory Site.

Why is it significant?

What remains of Hensley Park Homestead Complex is of archaeological significance for the high potential for physical fabric which may exist below surface. This fabric has the potential to allow us to understand the day to day lives of pastoral families who lived and worked on the land. The former Hensley Park Homestead complex is of historical significance for its association with Thomas Brommell, MLA, and his family who have been important members of the Hamilton community for over 140 years. It is of further historical significance for the long history of ownership in the same family, from 1862 to current day. The schoolroom provides us with further historical evidence of the way in which people lived, and the development of local schools around major pastoral enterprise. The trees which are planted near the school house are typical of the use of sombre evergreen trees with dark foliage used for both shade and identification of places of

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learning. They represent a traditional planting practice around schools in the nineteenth century.

**ASSESSED BY:** tfh & mgt

**ASSESSMENT DATE:**

3/11/2003

**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
Alexander Sutherland	Victoria and Its Metropolis, Vol. 2	1888	59
Don Garden	Hamilton: a Western District History	1984	var.
Hamilton History Centre	Hensley Park File	n.d.	various