

# Growth, Progress and Community Spirit

A HISTORY OF THE MELTON DISTRICT



Lucy Bracey, Fiona Poulton  
and Ellen Spalding



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**A history of the Melton district**



First published in 2018

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Title page image: Aerial view of residential development in the new suburb of Aintree, 2018.  
Melton City Council

Melton City Council acknowledges the Kulin Nation as the traditional owners and custodians of this land and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

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# Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I present this history of the City of Melton.

Our City boundaries have changed and grown considerably over the years, and this history recognises the suburbs that now make up the City of Melton. From Toolern Vale to Eynesbury, Ravenhall to Diggers Rest, Melton to Caroline Springs, our City has a rich and interesting story to tell.

The idea of creating a history of our municipality was first put forward by Councillor Sophie Ramsey, who wanted to celebrate our community and the wonderful City we live in. A project steering group, comprising both officers and Councillor representatives, was established to oversee the project, and I was privileged to be part of that group. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all involved in shaping the direction for the project.

In developing this story, we wanted to ensure the community had an opportunity to contribute. We encouraged residents to share their stories about their time in the City of Melton, and tell us what makes our community a unique and special place to live, work and study. It's wonderful to see many of these personal stories, memories and viewpoints included throughout this book.

*Growth, Progress and Community Spirit: a history of the Melton district* tells the story of our land from Dreamtime to present day. From the rich history of the original custodians, the men, women and children of the Kulin Nation, through to the declaration of the area as a Road District in 1862, the Shire of Melton in 1872, and becoming a City in 2012; we hear about the individuals and families who have played an important role in shaping the history of our community.

In commissioning this book, Council wanted it to commemorate the City of Melton – the place and its community – throughout its history. We wanted the book to be a celebration of the local area, its contribution to broader society and the community in which it is located. Throughout our history there are strong themes of growth and progress that have driven development and change in our suburbs. But the overarching theme is one of great community spirit and belonging.

OPPOSITE  
**A dry stone wall near the  
Mt Kororoit volcano.**  
Melton City Council

This also reflects Council's vision for our City as a thriving community where everyone belongs.

I would like to acknowledge and thank Way Back When Consulting Historians for their leadership in researching, developing and writing this wonderful book. The writing of history is an important way of reflecting on the past, whilst providing a sense of direction for the future. As our City faces the exciting prospect of continued growth, it is comforting to see this theme that has shaped our community for many years, so strongly reflected in each story and in our vision of what's to come.

On behalf of Melton City Council, I encourage you to delve into this book and explore the rich, diverse and fascinating history of our municipality.

Cr Bob Turner  
Mayor  
City of Melton



# Acknowledgements

This book is the result of an enormous amount of effort over many months from a large number of individuals with a passion for the rich history of the Melton district and a vision to share stories from the past with the broader community.

Firstly, we are indebted to the project steering group, assiduously headed by Troy Watson and comprising Mayor, Cr Bob Turner, Cr Lara Carli, Cr Melissa De Santis, Cr Michelle Mendes, Cr Sophie Ramsey, Tony Ball, Esther Clark, Maurie Heaney, and Susie Prestney. This group steered the project with enthusiasm and encouragement, providing information, suggestions and contacts, and commenting on the draft manuscript. We would also like to thank the entire Melton City Council, including additional councillors Deputy Mayor, Cr Ken Hardy, Cr Steve Abboushi, Cr Goran Kesic, and Cr Kathy Majdlik, for their support of the project.

Many Council staff assisted our research and writing by providing information and resources, images, contacts and access to archival collections. These include: Sally Atkinson, Georgina Borg, Linda Bradburn, Denis Bunworth, Ros Colwell, Darren Cunningham, Lawrie Conole, Essan Dileri, Holly Dillabough, Eilis Foreman, Linda Fuller, Elissa Haley, Nicole Hilder, Dan Hogan, Donna Ker, Karen Lee, Veena Menezes, Sera-Jane Peters, Heidi Taylor, Balaji Vasireddy, Annette Vickery, Janet Webb, John Whitfield and Stephen Wright.

Staff at Melton City Libraries and Melton Visitor Information Centre, and members of the Melton City Council Heritage Advisory Committee, Melton Family History Group, Melton & District Historical Society and Friends of the Melton Botanic Garden provided access to their collections and historical materials, shared their knowledge, granted permission to publish photographs and extracts of written material and have generally supported the project with great interest and passion.

The project has been enthusiastically supported by many community members who have generously shared stories, memories, information and items from their own personal collections with us. We would particularly like to thank Wendy Barrie, Jill and John Bentley, Judith and

George Bilszta, Antoinette Braybrook, Bernard Coburn, Kevin Condon, Eileen Day, John and Mary Dodemaide, Melva and Stephen Hirt, Glenda Hutchison, Maureen and Shane Jongebloed, Christine Love, Beth McDonald, Jean and Allan Partridge, Malcolm Peacock, Alan and Dot Perry, Irene Richards, Deborah Slattery, Lyn Smaila, Gary Stock, and Charlie Zerafa.

Peter Webster and local Indigenous Elders from the Kirrip Aboriginal Corporation were incredibly generous in sharing their stories and experiences with us. We are indebted also to Dan Turnbull and Eric Edwards from the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, Julieanne Axford and Gail Smith from the Wurundjeri Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Aboriginal Corporation and Bryon Powell from the Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation for sharing their knowledge and reading drafts of the early chapters.

We owe our sincere gratitude to our Way Back When colleagues Katherine Sheedy and Sarah Rood. Katherine has expertly managed this project, liaising with Council and community members, maintaining our momentum, meticulously editing numerous drafts and providing endless support and encouragement. Designer Lynda Patullo from Green Poles Design carefully integrated the text with a huge amount of images to create this stunning publication.

We are honoured to have been entrusted with the task of producing a comprehensive history of the Melton district, and hope that readers enjoy perusing these pages and discovering their depths as much as we have enjoyed creating them.

Lucy Bracey, Fiona Poulton and Ellen Spalding  
Way Back When Consulting Historians  
July 2018

# Note for readers

## **Population statistics**

The population statistics presented at the beginning of each chapter are taken from various sources, such as census records, heritage studies and directories. There are no official population records for Victoria prior to the 1841 census, which provides statistics only for the County of Bourke as a whole, not for individual districts. As a result, there are no population statistics available for the Melton district until 1865.

It should also be noted that these official records did not include everyone. Until 1967, Aboriginal people were not counted in the Commonwealth census. Chinese people were also often excluded from early historical records. This information should therefore be understood as an incomplete picture of the population in the City of Melton over time.

## **Indigenous material**

Readers are advised that this book includes images and names of deceased people; it may also include words and descriptive terms that may be offensive to Indigenous Australians. This material is presented as part of the record of the past; contemporary users should interpret the work within that context.



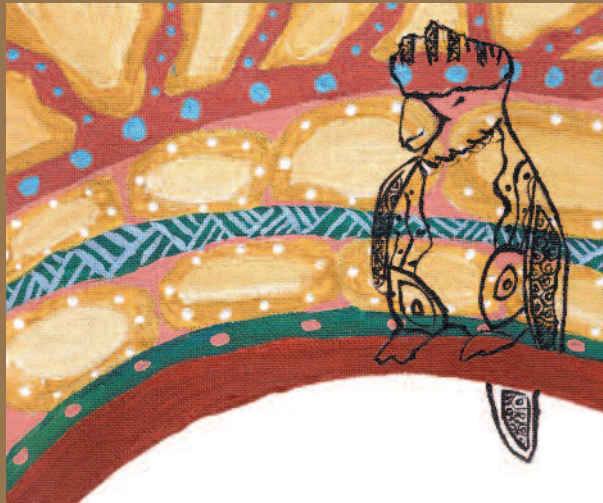




CHAPTER 1

# The Land

Dreamtime to 1835



*We must try to imagine the depth of feeling of this contest between original owners, who saw the land as life, as their cultural essence and identity, and newcomers, who saw it as an arcadia, the reward for their uprooting from distant homes and hearths.<sup>1</sup>*

*Aboriginal Victorians: a history since 1800*

Dreamtime—1835

**1 THE LAND**  
Dreamtime to 1835

**2 DIVERGENT STORIES**  
1835 to 1850

**3 A COMMUNITY EMERGES**  
1850 to 1900  
Population in 1865: 1,000

**4 TRANSFORMATIONS**  
1900 to 1940  
Population in 1919: 1,700

**5 OPEN FOR PROGRESS**  
1940 to 1980  
Population in 1973: 9,500

**6 A CITY FOR THE FUTURE**  
1980 to 2018  
Population in 2016: 135,443

#### PREVIOUS PAGES

**Geological map of Victoria, 1873, showing the volcanic formations of the western plains.**

Robert Brough Smyth, State Library Victoria

**Designed by local Indigenous artist Mandi Barton, a Yorta Yorta woman, this artwork features the pink galah in a design that represents the various colours of the Melton area: red ochre for the earth, green for plant life and lilac for the wild flowers. The blue is the waterways and the yellow represents the basalt area, the valleys and creek beds.**

Melton City Council



THE MODERN AND VIBRANT CITY OF MELTON sits on land so ancient that it can be hard to comprehend. Concrete and bitumen, homes and businesses, farms and schools, churches and factories – all these familiar landmarks of the Melton we know today exist on a majestically time-honoured landscape with a remarkable history. It has taken millions of years to form this land; the flat grassy plains and woodlands, the rocky earth, the rivers and creeks and the low volcanic peaks that mark the horizon. As residents and visitors go about their day-to-day business, these deep histories can be hard to perceive, but they continue to live beneath our feet.

An awe-inspiring chapter of this history is the extraordinary story of the people who, until only around 200 years ago, influenced and managed the landscape that was their home, their source of nourishment and their spiritual base. These were the men, women and children of the Kulin Nation. On this place that we now call Melton and its surrounds, Kulin people flourished within a complex and bountiful landscape that provided them with everything they needed. Aboriginal names given to some of these places, such as Mount Kororoit, Djerriwarrh and Toolern Creek, honour the original custodians of the land.

Kulin custodians are likely to describe their presence around Port Phillip Bay as being from time immemorial. A European scientific perspective is that Aboriginal people have lived on this land for at least 60,000 years, or more than 2,000 generations.<sup>2</sup>

#### Land formation

The City of Melton sits on a vast basalt lava plain created by millions of years of volcanic activity during what is known as the late Quarternary Period, two to five million years ago.<sup>3</sup> The Western Volcanic Plains cover ten per cent of the state and encompass the area from Darebin Creek in

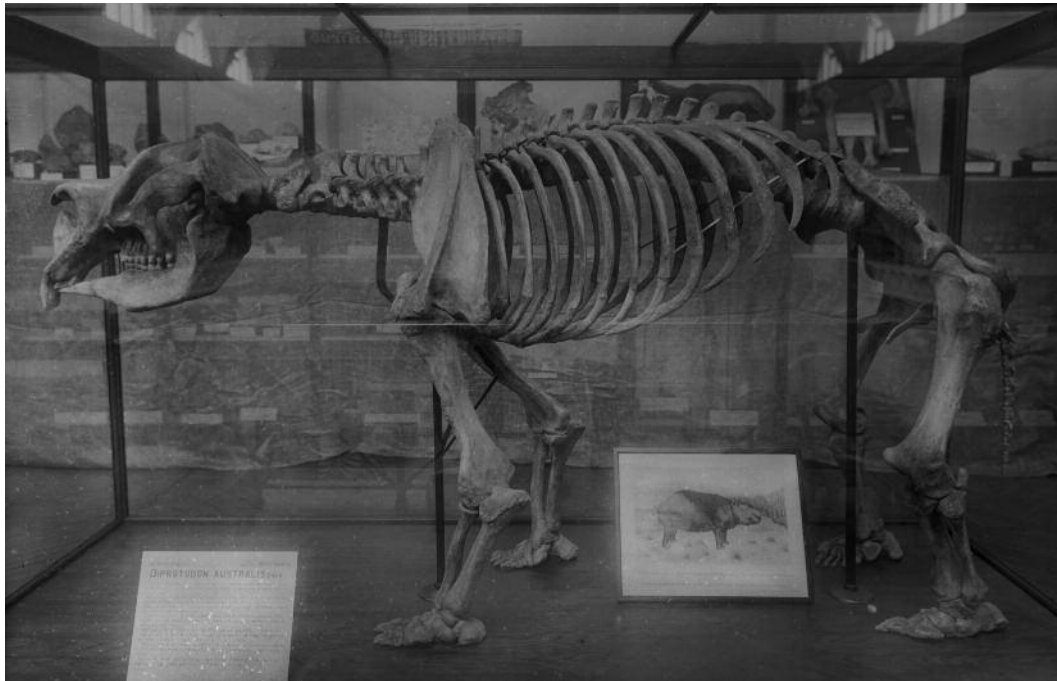


Melbourne to Mount Gambier in South Australia. This constitutes the largest volcanic area in Australia and the third largest volcanic plains region in the world.<sup>4</sup>

Volcanic eruptions saw lava move across the open landscape, cooling rapidly to create the hard volcanic stone we call basalt. Although unimpressive as a mountain peak, even the low-lying site of Mount Cottrell produced some of the greatest lava flows in the western district of Victoria.<sup>5</sup> Other local rises, such as Mount Kororoit and Mount Atkinson, were also once vents of molten lava.<sup>6</sup>

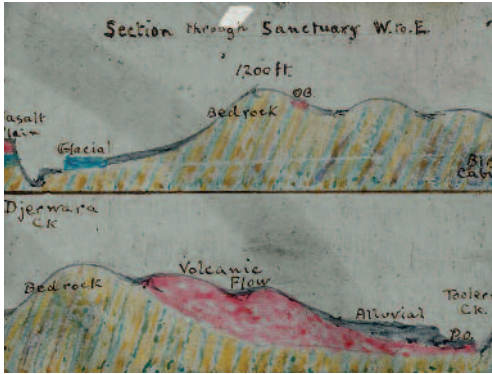
There was still volcanic activity across the open plains of Victoria's western district as little as seven and a half thousand years ago, well within the time that Aboriginal people were living on the land.<sup>7</sup> People lived and survived amongst this tumultuous volcanic environment, witnessing eruptions, smelling the volcanic gasses and observing the lava mass moving across the earth and transforming the landscape in its wake.

This foundation of basalt or bluestone quarried from areas all around the west of Melbourne,



**Bones from the giant marsupial *Diprotodon*, which lived tens of thousands of years ago alongside Aboriginal people, were discovered in a Melton creek in 1923.**

Photographer A.J. Campbell. Museums Victoria Collections, MM 47261



**A 1934 lantern slide showing a cross-section of the land at the Toolern Vale bird sanctuary.**

Photographer A.G. Campbell. Museums Victoria Collections, BA 1298

including Melton, has been a valuable material in the construction of towns and cities. It was frequently used to construct Melton's bridges and buildings, including homesteads, churches and schools, as well as Melton's iconic dry stone walls. Many elegant bluestone buildings – churches in particular – still stand in Melton and other Victorian towns like Ballarat, Geelong, Kyneton and Portland.<sup>8</sup>

Over time, Port Phillip Bay and the area around what is now Melton have undergone enormous transformation, subject to proclivities of extreme climatic variation and geomorphic change.<sup>9</sup> One of the more dramatic changes occurred in Port Phillip Bay and Bass Strait, where a land bridge allowed travel from the mainland of Australia to what is now Tasmania, a huge open grassy plain 'dissected by swollen rivers'.<sup>10</sup> By around 12,000 years ago, Tasmania and the mainland became separated by a body of water, cutting off Tasmanian people from the mainland. Over thousands of years, the Boon Wurrung people, custodians of the land around Port Phillip Bay and one of the language groups with an ongoing association with Melton, adapted to this dramatic geological variability. They have cultural memory of these ancient events that remains alive in stories still told today.<sup>11</sup>

Up to around 20,000 years ago, Aboriginal people in south-east Australia shared the environment with a range of giant fauna, such as the two-tonne marsupial *Diprotodon optatum*. Bones of the *Diprotodon* were discovered in a Melton creek in 1923, and are now part of the Museum Victoria collection.<sup>12</sup> There is evidence that these creatures, which were mostly herbivores, are likely to have been a source of food for Kulin people.<sup>13</sup>

## Country

What did the landscape around current-day Melton look like at the time Europeans first arrived? Written accounts of these plains paint a picture of a vast open expanse dominated by tall kangaroo grass, which could grow to more than a metre high.<sup>14</sup> Also present was a diverse mix of other species of grasses, daisies, lilies, orchids and native peas.<sup>15</sup> Tree coverage was minimal, with intermittent patches of sheoaks, bulokes, wattles, banksia and patches of Grey Box woodland.<sup>16</sup> Vegetation along some of the many waterways would have consisted of River Red Gums up to 15 metres high, River Bottlebrush, and rushes and thick reeds lining the edge of the creeks and rivers.<sup>17</sup>

Colonist Joseph Tice Gellibrand described the scene as he crossed to the western side of what is now Kororoit Creek and glanced west over the flat expanse spread out before him:

The land was then quite flat and rather rocky and from the Ford to the station on the Exe [Werribee] a distance of fourteen miles and in fact up to Geelong Harbour consists of open plains with a thin coat of grass and exposed to the cold winds.<sup>18</sup>

Estimates suggest that in 1788, when the First Fleet arrived to establish the colony of New South Wales, there were around 60,000 Aboriginal people in Victoria.<sup>19</sup> When Europeans started moving through the plains and waterways that now lie within the City of Melton, these lands were the traditional territory of the Kurun jang balug. The name Kurun jang balug translates as 'red ground people' for the distinctive deep red earth on which Melton is situated.<sup>20</sup> This name is still a feature in Melton today, in the suburb of Kurunjang.

The boundaries of a clan's traditional lands were not neatly mapped out, yet the ownership of particular areas was, nevertheless, clearly defined. The Kurun jang balug occupied an area between the Werribee River and Kororoit Creek. Their neighbouring clan, the Marin-balluk, occupied territory further east, between Kororoit Creek and the Maribyrnong River, parts of which lie within the City of Melton's boundaries today.<sup>21</sup>

In the 1830s, when white settlers started to occupy the area, the Kurun jang balug clan-head or ngurungaeta was Bet Banger. He was a prominent Aboriginal leader who is known to have worked alongside white settlers in a variety of ways, and was an influential mediator in efforts to facilitate Kulin people's access to country.<sup>22</sup> The Kurun jang balug were members of the Wurundjeri-willam, a larger entity linked by kinship, family and religious ties that was also connected to a defined territory. Natural features are often markers of Aboriginal identities and geographies, and the Wurundjeri name combines the words 'wurun' for the white flowered Manna Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) and 'djeri', the grub that lives within the Manna bark.<sup>23</sup>

The Wurundjeri-willam were one of the clans of the wider Woi Wurrung, one of five language groups that made up the Kulin Nation, the term Kulin indicating the concept of 'human being'.<sup>24</sup> Three of these five Kulin language groups occupied territory in and around what is today the City of Melton: the Woi Wurrung, Boon Wurrung and Wathaurong. Today, ancestors from all three groups continue to claim vital traditional connections to this area.<sup>25</sup>



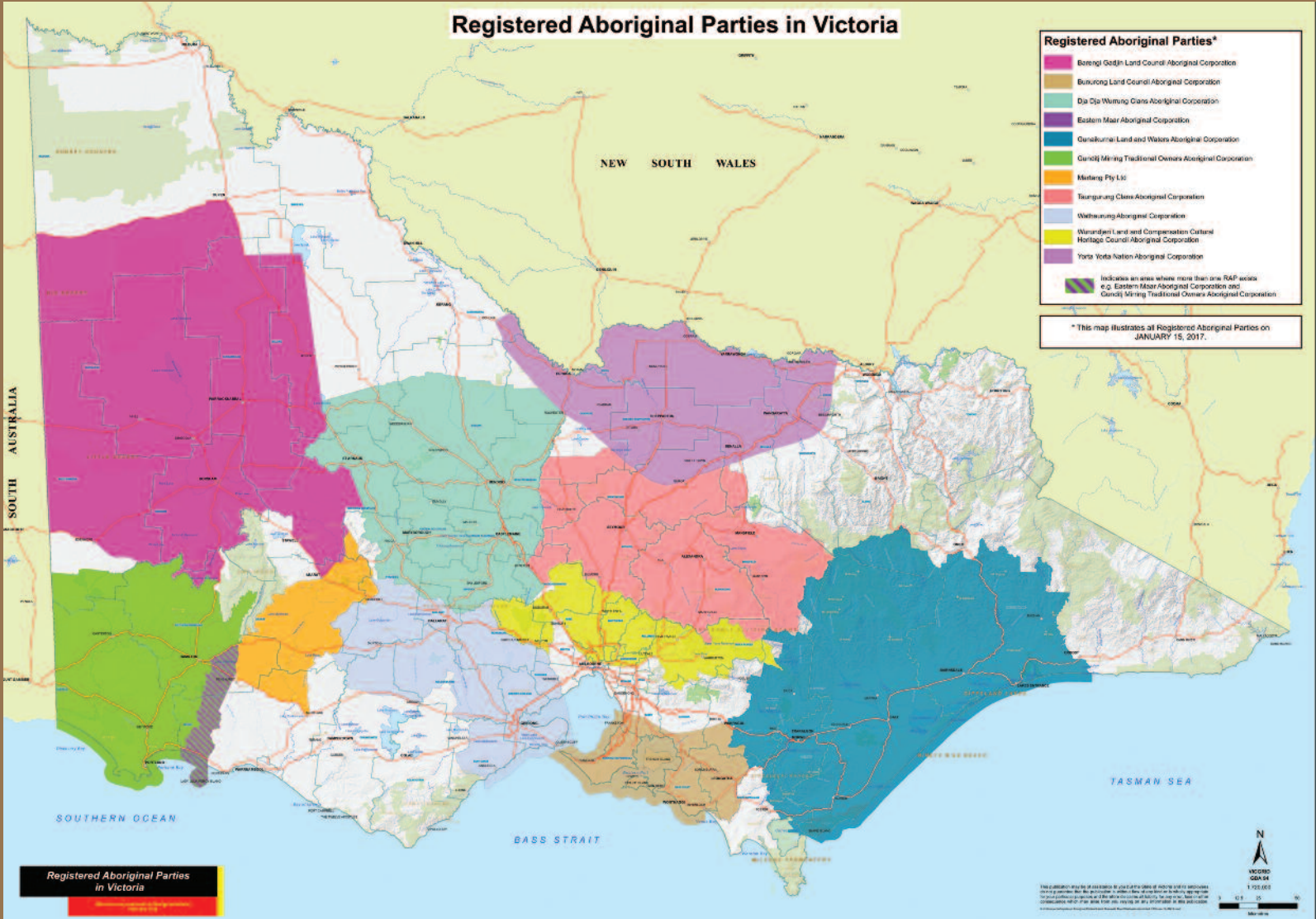
# Registered Aboriginal Parties in Victoria

**Registered Aboriginal Parties\***

- Berong Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
- Bulurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
- Da Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation
- Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation
- Geraakumar Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
- Gindji Ming Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation
- Mustang Pty Ltd
- Tsamprung Clans Aboriginal Corporation
- Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation
- Wurundjeri Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Aboriginal Corporation
- Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation

Indicates an area where more than one R&P exists  
e.g. Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation and Gindji Ming Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation

\* This map illustrates all Registered Aboriginal Parties on JANUARY 15, 2017.



**Registered Aboriginal Parties in Victoria**

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Scale: 1:250,000

Source: Victorian Government, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

Woi Wurrung lands were bounded to the south by Mordialloc Creek, to the west by the Werribee River, to the north by the Great Dividing Range and to the east by the Dandenong Ranges.<sup>26</sup> The traditional territory of the Wathaurong incorporates the western side of the Werribee River as far as Lorne, and north-west towards Ballarat.<sup>27</sup> Boon Wurrung (Bunurong) traditional lands hug much of Port Phillip Bay and Western Port Bay, as far east as Wilsons Promontory. The traditional estates of the other two Kulin groups, the Taungurong and the Djadjawurung, incorporate country further north and north-west of the Great Dividing Range. Kulin clans may have disputed boundaries at various times, but a particular clan's connection was usually 'intimately known to all people concerned'.<sup>28</sup>

While distinguishable clan identities existed, such as that of the Wurundjeri, there were also many vital cross-connections in the practices, languages and world views of Kulin people, equating to deeply felt social affiliations. Different groups did not exist completely independently of their compatriots, but were instead part of a web of interconnecting relationships, family and marriage ties, trade and ceremony. According to historian Gary Presland, these relationships were a way of negotiating connections between clans:

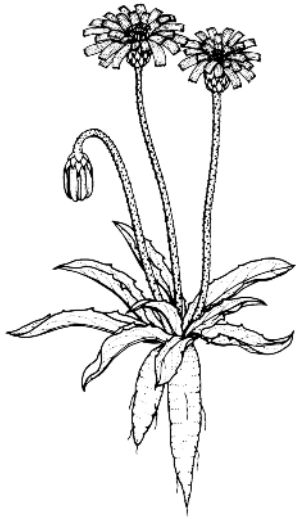
These people shared a religious world view and were joined by common ceremonial practices; the family connections that joined clans also allowed individuals to travel easily for the purposes of fulfilling ritual or ceremonial obligations.<sup>29</sup>

With these linked spiritual and social worlds, the Kulin also maintained important social and ritual connections by gathering for ceremony to enact mutual spiritual obligations, discuss important business and settle disputes. Archaeological evidence of this exists in the area. Digs have unearthed a series of earth rings on hillsides around Sunbury that are thought to be ceremonial sites. It has been suggested that these formations were locations for male initiation.<sup>30</sup>

The commonality of the languages spoken by different Kulin clans shows the strong degree of connectedness between the language groups. For example, Boon Wurrung speakers shared up to 93 per cent of their vocabulary with their Woi Wurrung neighbours and, in fact, 'most Kulin adults were multi-lingual'.<sup>31</sup> It is these separate but related Kulin languages that would have been spoken across the plains and waterways of what is today the City of Melton, and beyond.

**OPPOSITE**  
**Map showing Registered**  
**Aboriginal Parties in Victoria**  
**as of January 2017.**

Produced by Aboriginal Victoria © State of Victoria



**The murnong or yam daisy was one of the most important foods for Aboriginal people in the Melton area.**

*Microseris lanceolata*. Photo: C. Payne © Australian National Botanic Gardens

#### OPPOSITE

**Aboriginal people used fire to hunt animals and to actively manage the resources of the natural environment.**

Joseph Lycett, c. 1817. National Library of Australia, PIC MSR 12/1/4 #R5689

## Food collection and cultivation

For a long time, Aboriginal people have often been described simplistically as nomads and hunter-gatherers, implying that they wandered aimlessly through the landscape, opportunistically capturing or gathering food when they happened to encounter it. This characterisation dramatically understates the depth of mastery that Australia's First People had over their lands, and the many tangible ways they actively used their environment in order to feed themselves and their families.

Kulin people's food production and agricultural practices demonstrate an exceptionally complex understanding of the land on which they lived. Theirs was a genuinely sustainable lifestyle that stemmed from thousands of years of lived experience of interacting with the land, combined with an effective system of transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next. This understanding of plants, animals, seasonal changes, weather patterns, fire management, soils, water sources, and food collection and production, encouraged biodiversity.

As Bunurong man and historian Bruce Pascoe points out, the pre-European environment was:

Not a wilderness, not a land peopled by wanderers, but a managed landscape created by the enormous labour of a people intent on creating the best possible conditions for food production.<sup>32</sup>

Kangaroo would have made up a significant part of the Kulin diet, as well as koala, wombat, birds, snakes, lizards, grubs, mussels, and other small native mammals. Possums were another important source of food, but were also vital for making possum skin cloaks. Apart from keeping people warm in the cooler climate of south-eastern Australia, possum skin cloaks also had spiritual power and would travel with an individual through their entire life. For First Nations people in the Melton area today, the possum skin cloak continues to be a hugely important ritual object used in ceremony, which connects people with culture.<sup>33</sup>

Fish and eels were another critical part of the Kulin diet. Clever usage of nets, spears, or even just a quick hand, could yield large quantities of both, depending on the time of year: 'two men could catch as much as twenty kilograms [of eel] in a short time without having to go far'.<sup>34</sup> Another significant means by which Kulin people were able to sustain their communities was by constructing large networks of ingeniously designed traps that restricted water flow to control









**Fish traps being used by Aboriginal people on the Darling River, New South Wales, c. 1870s. Similar traps are likely to have been used in the waterways of the Melton area.**

Henry King, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, PXA 434

fish movements, trapping them in funnel-shaped pots as they moved downstream.<sup>35</sup> Early squatter John Batman recorded seeing these extensive traps near the You Yangs during his 1835 travels through the district:

We saw several places on going up, which the natives had made with stones across the creek, to take fish; I supposed in summer time. The walls were built of stones about four feet high, and well done and well planned out. Two or three of these places following each other down the stream with gates to them, which they appear to stop with a bundle of rushes. We saw those in about ten or twelve different places up this stream.<sup>36</sup>

It is likely that similar structures existed in waterways closer to Melton.<sup>37</sup>

Plants were the other major source of food and formed as much as half of the Kulin diet.<sup>38</sup> Seasonal cultivation of plants was another means by which Victorian Aboriginal people are known to have used ancient knowledge to manipulate the environment to produce what they needed. One of the most important foods in south-east Australia was the abundant and nutritious tuber from the delicate yellow-flowered murnong, or yam daisy (*Microseris walteri*).

Nineteenth-century European accounts describe Aboriginal women tending to their yam gardens *en masse*, digging the soil with tools and cultivating huge quantities of the vegetable. The Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Port Phillip District, George Augustus Robinson, described a scene he witnessed in north-central Victoria in 1840: 'women were spread out over the plain as far as the eye could see, collecting Murnong . . . each had a load as much as she could carry'. In 1836, early colonists around Sunbury, Isaac Batey and Edward Page, made similar observations.<sup>39</sup>

Knowing how to produce large quantities of murnong was merely the tip of the iceberg of Kulin people's understanding of plants. There are over a thousand recorded plants that are known to have been used by Victorian Aboriginal people for a wide range of purposes, including food, fibre, medicine, implements and cement.<sup>40</sup>

Possibly the most powerful tool the first custodians of the land utilised to sustain their environment and maximise food sources was fire. The controlled use of fire by First Nations people in Victoria and all across Australia was a refined and deliberate method of resource management that created perpetual abundance of both animals and plants.<sup>41</sup> Many early

Europeans in Australia noticed the maintained appearance of the landscape they encountered, noting in written accounts the evidence they saw of burning practices. In 1837, during a visit to the newly emerging Port Phillip colony, Governor of New South Wales Sir Richard Bourke made mention of the scorched landscape as he headed west towards the 'Exe or Werribee' River.<sup>42</sup>

Firestick practices had multiple benefits, maximising plant and animal food stocks and encouraging biodiversity, an essential part of maintaining a healthy environment. Containing the growth of foliage also facilitated people's ease of movement through country.<sup>43</sup> This knowledge of fire and land management was particularly critical for the dry, fire-susceptible plains of Melton and surrounds, and is an integral aspect of what the Woi Wurrung language calls *biik tartbanerra*, or 'earth care'.<sup>44</sup>

Not only did Kulin men and women successfully feed themselves and their families and enjoy a high standard of living, their way of life also allowed for a significant amount of leisure time. The resources around Port Phillip were so plentiful, and local people's skill in harnessing those resources so refined, that Aboriginal people could work as little as thirty hours a week to survive. With some of the highest standards of living in the world, the First Australians had plenty of spare time for maintaining tools, attending to spiritual and tribal business and for leisure activities.<sup>45</sup>

### Spirit

For a variety of reasons, sometimes our eyes are not able to see that Aboriginal places still exist beneath our feet. Our ears cannot hear the voices of the Kulin ancestors who spoke their unifying languages when they lived on the very same land that we occupy today. But if our minds are open, this history is present for us to experience today.

One of the places where this is possible is the Bullum Bullum Aboriginal place, located at Burnside along the City of Melton boundary of Kororoit Creek. Bullum Bullum translates as 'white butterfly' in the Woi Wurrung language, and represents the powerful universal concept of 'freedom of expression'.<sup>46</sup>

Evidence of Aboriginal occupation is regularly unearthed around waterways, and Bullum Bullum has been found to be rich in artefacts connecting it to its Wurundjeri custodians, including the Kurun jang balug and the Marin-balluk. If you visit Bullum Bullum today, the dramatic rock

formations, tall, soft reeds and the tranquillity of the creek invite you to feel something of the land and its people prior to European occupation. This connection is not a lost relic of the past, but is very real for First Nations people living today, as Wurundjeri Elder Ron Jones describes:

This place [Bullum Bullum] holds special significance for my family. My mother, Julia Jones, was the last traditionally initiated woman within our tribe. Bullum Bullum is the tribal name she received as part of her initiation. It makes my family very proud that her work for Aboriginal Victorians has been recognised. She did so much for our people.<sup>47</sup>

A crucial aspect of Kulin people's spiritual patrimony was, and remains today, creation stories that explain how the land, its people, its animals and plants, and the systems of belief and behaviour that codified life came to be. Two central creator spirits lie at the heart of this universe, the heroic eaglehawk, Bunjil, and the cunning crow, Waa.<sup>48</sup> Each Kulin clan is associated with one of these two, essentially dividing Kulin society into two halves.<sup>49</sup> The Kurun jang balug were of the Waa moiety.<sup>50</sup>



**John Helder Wedge's 1835 sketch of Aboriginal women digging for the roots of the yam daisy, which they actively cultivated across south-eastern Australia.**

State Library Victoria, MS10768

Through these deep spiritual connections, it is possible to see that the land and its bounty was, and remains, more than just a means of sustenance. Belonging to the land lies at the very heart of Aboriginal peoples' identity, and their spiritual, emotional, interpersonal and physical existence.

### Life interrupted

A rag-tag collection of white whalers, sealers, bark cutters and others had some transient presence around Port Phillip Bay in the early 1800s. Some of their actions were recounted by Bunurong people, including harrowing stories of Bunurong women and children being kidnapped by these white interlopers.<sup>51</sup> But it was the wanderings of white men such as Charles Grimes, the single-minded ambition of men such as John Batman and John Pascoe Fawkner, and the entrepreneurial zeal of the likes of William John Turner Clarke, that would spell catastrophe for the ancient, effective and complete civilisation that had used the intelligence and ingenuity of thousands of years to keep their land and their people healthy.

The beginnings of a European settlement at Melton marked the end of something else. For the Woi Wurrung, Boon Wurrung and Wathaurong people of the Kulin Nation, the gradual appearance of white men in the early part of the nineteenth century sounded the death knell for Kulin ascendancy over the land, of which they had been custodians for more than two thousand generations. The arrival of these foreigners, with their animals, fences, religion and culture, meant the end of the Kulin traditional way of life. The devastation caused by early pastoralists, through the introduction of sheep, cattle, foxes, rabbits and dogs, and the application of British farming methods to the unique Australian landscape, must have shocked and outraged the Aboriginal custodians. Kulin families, culture, food sources and spiritual places were overtaken and desecrated, people were killed, their languages lost. For the Aboriginal people of Victoria and the First Nations people from all over Australia, life under the new regime would no longer be about thriving, it would instead become about surviving.

Sometimes this truth is difficult to accept. At times, very divergent versions of the same events have been told. By examining the historical record, and coming together in our understanding of what took place and what was lost, we have a chance to heal, and to reap the rewards of a truly monumental shared history.



**Kulin people maintained important social and ritual connections by gathering for ceremony to enact spiritual obligations, discuss important business and settle disputes. This painting by William Barak depicts an Aboriginal ceremony, c. 1880-1890.**

State Library Victoria, H29641





## CHAPTER 2

# Divergent Stories

1835–1850



*...nowhere in the land of the Eastern Kulin are the landscapes unchanged from those first encountered by Europeans in the nineteenth century. The impact of the presence of Europeans has been to alter massively the environments that were an integral part of an ancient way of life ... Although Europeans had no sense of it, in occupying the land to the exclusion of its former owners they were in essence destroying the culture of those people directly.<sup>1</sup>*

*First People: the Eastern Kulin of Melbourne, Port Phillip & Central Victoria*

1835–1850

**1 THE LAND**  
Dreamtime to 1835

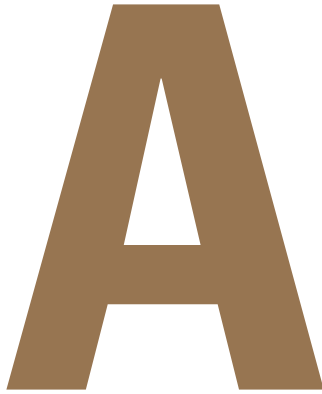
**2 DIVERGENT STORIES**  
1835 to 1850

**3 A COMMUNITY EMERGES**  
1850 to 1900  
Population in 1865: 1,000

**4 TRANSFORMATIONS**  
1900 to 1940  
Population in 1919: 1,700

**5 OPEN FOR PROGRESS**  
1940 to 1980  
Population in 1973: 9,500

**6 A CITY FOR THE FUTURE**  
1980 to 2018  
Population in 2016: 135,443



#### PREVIOUS PAGES

**John Helder Wedge's 1835 plan of the Port Phillip District, including the 'River Weariby' and 'Extensive open grassy plains' to the west.**

State Library Victoria, MS 13487

**Painting depicting John Batman agreeing to a so-called 'treaty' with Aboriginal people at Merri Creek, 6 June 1835.**

John Wesley Burr. State Library Victoria, H92.196

#### OPPOSITE

**'The Batman deed', the treaty drawn up by John Batman and William Todd on 6 June 1835. It relates to 100,000 acres of land in Port Phillip, signed over by leaders of the Kulin Nation in exchange for a yearly 'rent', food, tools and other objects.**

State Library Victoria, MS 13130

AS THE FIRST EUROPEANS SET FOOT on the volcanic plains around Port Phillip Bay, two entirely different experiences began to run parallel. The outcomes for the protagonists in these divergent stories were vastly different. One side emerged the victor, asserting authority across their 'new' lands. The other side, despite their efforts to defend themselves, were vanquished, their dominion over the land that had been their uncontested universe for thousands of years ignored, denied and, ultimately, taken.

Why did Europeans settle in this south-eastern corner of the Australian continent in the 1830s? Some belonged to a cohort of wily fortune-seekers who had travelled from Tasmania in search of pastoral land, which they hoped to quietly occupy under the noses of both the colonial authorities and the Aboriginal occupants. Others represented British colonial powers and sought to assert the authority of that power in opening up new land to accommodate the growing settlement in New South Wales.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of the motivation of the strangers' arrival in Kulin territories, there is one thing they all wanted: land.<sup>3</sup>

### Arrival

In the 1830s there was a flurry of activity from newly arrived European settlers across Victoria's western plains, as they raced to lay claim to vast tracts of what was considered to be unoccupied and unclaimed land. The plains around Melton were some of the earliest to be settled by European pastoralists in Victoria.<sup>4</sup> The suitability of the land around Melton to graze livestock fired the imagination of generations of white settlers and made pastoralism the oldest and most dominant industry in the contemporary history of the area.

By the 1830s, Kulin people would have been aware of the presence of strangers on or near









**British explorers Hamilton Hume and William Hovell were the first white men to travel across the western plains of Victoria. This map shows the route they took on their 1824 expedition.**

Department of Crown Lands and Survey,  
Victoria. State Library Victoria

their territories, but traditional life had been, for the main part, able to continue unhindered. An assortment of sealers, explorers, naval vessels and convicts had entered Port Phillip before there was any formal settlement and there are various recorded encounters between groups of European visitors and the Kulin inhabitants.<sup>5</sup> Both John Murray and Matthew Flinders explored Port Phillip Bay in 1802, and the following year colonial government surveyor Charles Grimes came close to what is now Melton, having mapped the perimeter of Port Phillip Bay and, to some extent, its tributaries, the Yarra and the Maribyrnong (Saltwater) rivers. There had also been an attempt at a settlement at present-day Sorrento in 1803, led by Lieutenant Colonel David Collins, although it was abandoned after just a few short months, due to a lack of fresh water.<sup>6</sup> Members of one Collins' survey parties had a particularly striking encounter with Aboriginal people defending country at the Werribee River:

...as 200 shouting Wathawurrung, some with faces painted in red, white and yellow clays, bore down upon the surveyors, brandishing spears. Several carried between them, on their shoulders, a warrior wearing a reed necklace, a large septum bone and a massive coronet of swan's feather.

This dramatic event resulted in a warrior being shot and the charge halted.

There is also evidence that Kulin people had some contact with another group of outsiders prior to the 1830s. The seafaring Macassans from the Indonesian island of Sulawesi are thought to have brought a devastating smallpox epidemic to the Australia mainland, which may have killed around half of the Victorian Aboriginal population before the first European settlers arrived.<sup>7</sup>

It was another twenty years before the next white explorations around Port Phillip were recorded, when Hamilton Hume and William Hovell made their mark as the first white men to traverse the western plains during their 1824 expedition.<sup>8</sup> Turning south from what is now Seymour, the party crossed the Great Dividing Range and entered Woi Wurrung territory.<sup>9</sup> They crossed Jacksons Creek near the current-day Organ Pipes National Park, eventually finding themselves camped at what is now Lara.<sup>10</sup> In diaries written on this journey, Hovell noted his impressions of the fertile land: 'the soil everywhere were [sic] beyond description good'.<sup>11</sup>

In 1839, William Wedge Darke completed the first detailed survey of the Melton district.<sup>12</sup> Darke was a young assistant surveyor to the colonial government surveyor Robert Russell, sent

by the New South Wales authorities to survey land around the fledging settlement of Melbourne, which had been established three years earlier in 1835. Darke was asked to survey the plains west of Melbourne in response to the looming presence of fortune-seekers such as John Pascoe Fawkner and John Batman, who was a founding member of a syndicate of investors, the Port Phillip Association. These men had first-hand experience acquiring land in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). Having heard rumours from the Hume and Hovell expedition of the excellent grazing potential of the volcanic plains in the western section of Port Phillip Bay, by the mid-1830s the members of the Port Phillip Association were focused on expanding their activities into this pasture.<sup>13</sup>

Darke's elegant, hand-drawn survey shows the landscape around present-day Melton divided into neat blocks of 640 acres, irregular only where natural features interrupt the neatly ruled lines. This formal grid later became the reference point for the first land sales that took place in the area now known as the City of Melton in 1840.<sup>14</sup>

Members of the Port Phillip Association became the first white settlers in the area, thereby making their mark as the European founders of the Melton district. The conjunction of this officially sanctioned division of land in the form of Darke's survey, and Batman's opportunistic portioning-off of land to his associates from the Port Phillip Association, represented a momentous turning point for this landscape and for the Kulin people who it had sustained for thousands of years. The takeover of this land, and shift from one world view to another, was underway. The most dramatic symbol of this change from one occupying civilisation to another was the arrival of thousands upon thousands of sheep.

In more established areas of the colony the wool trade was finding its feet, and a lucrative wool export industry was rich with the promise of extraordinary profits.<sup>15</sup> In that vista of hundreds of miles of open grassland, woodlands and waterways to the west of the new settlement of Melbourne, the men of the Port Phillip Association dreamt of establishing extensive pastoral enterprises on which their fortunes would be made.

Despite the fact that the land was already occupied by another people, the colonial powers in New South Wales operated under the concept of *terra nullius* (no one's land) – that the land was unoccupied when the British arrived on the Australian continent. The colonial authorities, with Governor Bourke at the helm, considered themselves the rightful owners. They stated that 'to settle Port Phillip was to trespass on crown land and commit a crime'.<sup>16</sup>

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM  
TOP LEFT

**Squatters claimed vast expanses of land in Port Phillip by marking it out for themselves, as did the first European settlers in the Melton district.**

Samuel Calvert. State Library Victoria, IAN01/08/88/supp/17

**Nerowie homestead in Parwan was built in the 1890s for Stephen John Staughton, grandson of Simon Staughton of the Exford Estate.**

Melton City Council

**Buildings on the Exford Estate in the 1960s.**

Photographer John T. Collins. State Library Victoria, H98.250/188

**Graves of early landowners in the Melton district, the Pyke brothers, by the Toolern Creek. They are now located in the Melton Valley Golf Course.**

J.T. Collins Collection, La Trobe Picture Collection. State Library Victoria, H98.250/146

Fully aware of this prohibition, the mechanism by which the syndicate of squatters in the Port Phillip Association managed to claim these swathes of Victoria's Western Volcanic Plains was John Batman's infamous 'treaty'. This document saw clan leaders across the Kulin Nation sign over hundreds of thousands of acres of traditional Kulin lands to Batman in exchange for a yearly 'rent or tribute', and a collection of blankets, knives, scissors, food and other objects.<sup>17</sup>

Batman's so-called 'treaty' was controversial at the time and remains so today. It has been analysed and widely condemned since being enacted on the banks of the Merri Creek in May 1835.<sup>18</sup> Although some have seen Batman's treaty as an attempt to form equitable and friendly relations with the Traditional Owners of the land, it is denounced by others as a self-interested means of invading and taking possession of traditional Aboriginal lands.<sup>19</sup> Kulin participants are likely to have perceived the agreement as akin to their own *Tanderrum* or 'Freedom of the Bush' ceremony; an understanding that allowed strangers 'temporary access to clan resources'.<sup>20</sup> John Batman's motives are also questionable given he openly participated in killing Aboriginal people in Tasmania.<sup>21</sup>

The 'treaty' was dismissed by the colonial government as having no legal authority, but settlers arrived anyway and the government was forced to open up Port Phillip to settlement. A group of wealthy and influential men and their families, with connections to the Port Phillip Association, became the some of the earliest white settlers to establish pastoral holdings to the west of the fledging village of Melbourne.

### Early settlers

By the time of Darke's survey and the first official land sales, others had already independently settled in the western district. The mantle of first European settler family in Melton is commonly given to brothers Thomas, William, Robert, Oliver and George Pyke, although there is some cause for dispute.<sup>22</sup> The Pyke estate, known as the Pennyroyal Creek pastoral run, is considered by some as 'the foundation of the City of Melton'.<sup>23</sup> Born in Wiltshire, England to a wealthy landowning family, the Pykes claimed an area along Pennyroyal Creek, which is now known as Toolern Creek, in 1838. However, the presence of pre-existing small buildings suggests that earlier white settlers had already made their mark on the site.<sup>24</sup> By the 1840s, the Pyke station had a reputation as the venue for hunts, hosted by Thomas 'Gentleman' Pyke.<sup>25</sup>





1835-1850





Three of the Pyke brothers died within a five-year period: William in 1850, Oliver in 1852 and George in 1855. They are interred at the historic Pyke gravesite that sits today on the eastern side of the Toolern Creek at the Melton Valley golf course.<sup>26</sup> The area was named Pyke's Plains in the 1850s in honour of the efforts of these pioneering siblings.<sup>27</sup>

Another figure sometimes described as 'Melton's first settler' is Edinburgh-born squatter John Hunter Patterson, who, like his contemporaries, came to the mainland from Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) with a goal to establish a grazing empire on the plains of Port Phillip. Patterson's station was Greenhills, situated in the 'Scottish enclave' of Yangardook, or Toolern Vale as it is now known.<sup>28</sup> Having sent 'six cargoes of sheep from V.D [Van Diemen's] Land' in advance, Patterson established Greenhills on 40,000 acres in December 1836, making it one of the first pastoral enterprises in the district.<sup>29</sup> Greenhills was associated with a number of prominent names over the years, including John Batman's daughters, Eliza and Adelaide, who married the station's Collyer brothers. Pastoralists Macintosh, Browne, Hyde and Urquhart were also connected to Greenhills at various times.<sup>30</sup>

Some of the earliest roads and tracks in the area were made to service the station, including the first marked track to what is now Toolern Vale, which extended between Keilor and Greenhills.<sup>31</sup> The Greenhills station still exists today, boasting a 1903 Federation-style homestead and evidence of early outbuildings. It remains a place that holds ongoing heritage significance for the Melton community.<sup>32</sup>

Despite both John Hunter Patterson and the Pyke brothers often being identified as Melton's first settlers, John Aitken was grazing sheep in the area earlier than both parties. He arrived in Port Phillip in 1836, and moved his initial flock of 600 sheep onto the western plains in May that year, choosing a prime piece of land near the headwaters of the Kororoit Creek in the north-eastern section of the current day City of Melton.<sup>33</sup> Naming his 'claim' Mount Aitken, John Aitken had a significant impact on the wool industry in Victoria. Through his selection of the finest Merino stock and his later efforts in cross-breeding Merino and Leicesters, Aitken played a crucial role in the improvement of fleece quality and wool breeding stock and was known for several decades as 'the colony's leading flockmaster'.<sup>34</sup> While he may have excelled as a wool-grower, historical accounts suggest that John Aitken was not kindly towards the Kulin inhabitants and was feared and avoided by Aboriginal people.<sup>35</sup>

Simon Staughton was another of the early pastoralists that independently settled in the

**OPPOSITE**  
**Map showing the land surveys made in Port Phillip in 1840, including the parishes of Djerriwarrh, Kororoit, Mooradooranook and Pywheitjorrk within the County of Bourke, where the City of Melton is located today.**

John Arrowsmith. State Library Victoria



**This 1871 watercolour depicts two stockmen camped beside a waterhole. The land in the Melton district was popular with early pastoral settlers, given its suitability to graze livestock.**

S.T. Gill. State Library Victoria, H5260

Melton district. The Staughton name was prominent in the district for many decades. Having lost his family estate in England over a couple of risky bets on a greyhound in his youth, Simon Staughton recovered enough money to arrive in Melbourne with his wife, Mary, and their children in 1841, with considerable funds lining his pocket. The following year, Staughton gained the pastoral lease on a large stretch of land running between the Werribee (at that time known as the Exe) River and Little River, from Dr John Watton, who had acquired it via his personal connection with the Port Phillip Association.<sup>36</sup>

The Staughton family built a homestead at the junction of Toolern (Pennyroyal) Creek and the Werribee (Exe) River on a picturesque site that Darke's survey had originally marked as a village reserve.<sup>37</sup> Completed in around 1846, the original two-storey, eight-room house and farm outbuildings were expanded over time. Today, the Exford Estate homestead still stands in Melton South and is one of the oldest residences in Victoria.<sup>38</sup>



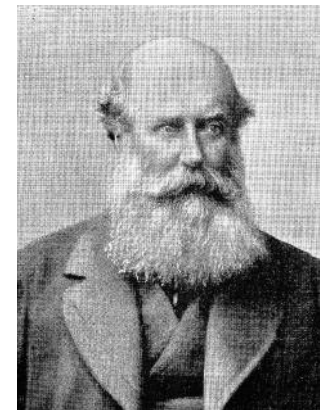


Staughton became a major land speculator of the Port Phillip district and one of the largest owners of freehold land in Victoria, expanding his pastoral empire with acquisitions in central Melbourne, and also on the Darling River in New South Wales. Some of the distinctive timber markers that encircled Staughton's 70,000-acre Brisbane Ranges and Exford runs still remain at the Willows Historical Park today.<sup>39</sup> The vast holdings were later divided between Staughton's sons and grandsons into the smaller Exford, Eynesbury, Brooklyn, Nerowie and Staughton Vale estates.

One of the most dominant pastoralists in the era of the post-Batman 'treaty' squattocracy of the 1830s was William John Turner 'Big' Clarke.<sup>40</sup> After establishing various grazing enterprises to Melbourne's west, Clarke continued to expand his holdings over time. This included purchasing sections of what had been Rockbank Station, previously owned by William Cross Yuille.<sup>41</sup> Yuille is another early figure of note. Having spent time in Hobart, he established the Rockbank run in 1841 in partnership with another entrepreneurial pastoralist, James Oliphant Denny, whose daughter he later married.<sup>42</sup> Yuille was the area's first importer of stud racehorses.<sup>43</sup>

James Pinkerton, described by fellow settler Isaac Batey as 'a fine old Scottish [sic] gentleman', and his wife Margaret established 'Chamois Ponds' on Kororoit Creek in the Keilor district in 1840.<sup>44</sup> After a fire in 1848, the Pinkerton family moved further west to a holding called Yaloke, on the Werribee River in the Melton district.<sup>45</sup> Today, the Surbiton Park water treatment plant operates on part of the Yaloke run.

The Pinkerton family is remembered in Melton in part due to the historic graves of the original settler, Margaret Pinkerton, and four of her grandchildren, which were marked by a memorial cairn in 1931. Changes to sewage flood zoning in the area in the 1990s necessitated that these burials be relocated. Members of the Melton & District Historical Society oversaw a project to relocate the Pinkerton graves and cairn 200 metres from their original site to their current resting place at Mount Cottrell.<sup>46</sup> This relocation ceremony took place on 8 November 1992, with the participation of local school students and with Pinkerton descendants playing a central role.<sup>47</sup> This occasion also marked the opening of the Pinkerton Forest Project, which saw 50 hectares of degraded woodland in Surbiton Park protected for regeneration.<sup>48</sup>



**Simon Staughton (top) and William Cross Yuille (bottom) were two of the district's earliest pastoralists, arriving in the early 1840s.**

Melton & District Historical Society  
The Illustrated Australian News. State  
Library Victoria, IAN01/08/94/21

1835-1850

# Dry stone walls

*The dry stone walls which cross the landscape in regular enclosure patterns make a fundamental statement about human interaction with the volcanic landscape of which they are a part.<sup>49</sup>*

*Shire of Melton Dry Stone Walls Study*

Dry stone walls are a familiar sight throughout the City of Melton, their beautifully rough and earthy hand-built forms stretching across paddocks and along roadsides. These walls provide a tangible link to the area's white settlement, and they remain a symbol of the profound change in land usage from the original Kulin custodians to the European arrivals of the nineteenth century.

The bulk of dry stone wall construction in Victoria occurred between the 1850s and 1880s.<sup>50</sup> The gold rush of the early 1850s in particular inspired a flurry of construction. At this time, labour previously available for shepherding livestock dried up, as men gravitated to the goldfields to seek their fortunes.<sup>51</sup> This necessitated the building of fencing to contain the district's growing number of sheep, cattle and horses. An explosion in surveying, subdivision and the sale of Crown lands also contributed to a boost in construction.<sup>52</sup> Government regulations that punished pastoralists for allowing their livestock to stray provided further incentive to fence-off previously open expanses of land.<sup>53</sup>

The major benefit of this type of fencing was that it utilised the materials at hand; the plentiful grey basalt that scattered the landscape. In the case of the dry stone walls built around Melton, the characteristic round or oval shape of the volcanic fieldstones on the western plains inspired some distinctive designs.<sup>54</sup> Another advantage of dry stone walls was their ability to withstand the ravages of flood, fire and drought often experienced in the district. This durability accounts for the fact that many of these fences still exist today.<sup>55</sup>

Today, the City of Melton's dry stone walls are held in great affection by both residents and visitors. The simple, time-honoured structures evoke another era, and reflect the ingenuity and knowledge of the skilled builders who constructed them. Nevertheless, many sections of these historic walls have been dismantled or neglected over the years, and the people of Melton now face the challenge of protecting the examples that remain. In 2016 Melton City Council was awarded for assessing and protecting the municipality's dry stone walls and educating the community about their value.<sup>56</sup>

**Dry stone walls and horses are iconic symbols of the Melton district's pastoral history.**

Melton & District Historical Society



Throughout the late 1830s and 1840s, tensions on the western plains remained high as competition for food and land increased between the early squatters and the local Aboriginal people. As early as 1840, the Assistant Protector of Aborigines for Port Phillip, Edward Stone Parker, observed the impossible situation that Aboriginal people rapidly found themselves in as the arrival of the first squatters began to impact on their ability to live on the land:

The very spots most valuable to the Aborigines for their productiveness – the creeks, watercourses and rivers are the first to be occupied ... it is common opinion among the settlers that the possession of a squatting licence entitles them with exclusion of the Aborigines from their runs.<sup>57</sup>

Water has always been a significant concern in the history of the district of Melton and surrounding areas. Creeks and rivers served multiple purposes. Not only did they provide fresh water, but for Kulin people they were also the source of a range of crucial plant and animal foods.



**View from Mount Aitken, looking towards the Dandenong Ranges, c. 1848. The land was irrevocably changed by the impact of European settlement and farming.**

George Alexander Gilbert. State Library Victoria, H41.814



1835-1850

Waterways such the Werribee River and Kororoit Creek provided physical markers indicating clan and tribal divisions, as well as being used for travel across country.<sup>58</sup> Within a few years of the first settlers arriving, these critical places that had been so pivotal to the day-to-day existence of Kulin people for millennia, became inaccessible. Aboriginal people faced catastrophic disruption to their way of life.

The presence of huge amounts of sheep and other livestock also created fatal disruption to the entire Kulin food-producing system. Very rapidly, these animals from the other side of the world caused the destruction of a large proportion of the staple foods that Aboriginal people had relied on for thousands of years. By 1840, over 700,000 sheep grazed central and western Victoria. Within two years, this number had doubled, and cattle numbers had increased to 100,000.<sup>59</sup>

Perhaps one of the most vivid symbols of the incompatibility between the two cultures and their use of the land is found in the fate of the murnong or yam daisy (*Microseris walteri*), which was particularly vulnerable to the damage wrought by grazing and the hard, cloven hooves of the sheep and cattle that had inundated the country. The spirit of enterprise and thirst for wealth of this first generation of European settlers created systems of land usage and production profoundly at odds with the Kulin peoples' ancient and intricate systems of knowledge and survival within that same landscape. Within five years of European settlement, murnong had largely disappeared from the area.<sup>60</sup>

So closely did the sheep crop the Myrnong, yam daisy, that the plant was eliminated from most areas of Victoria one season after the arrival of sheep and with it went the staple vegetable of the people of south-east Australia. Nothing, short of murder, could place more stress on any population.<sup>61</sup>

Other vital plant foods, as well as fauna, were depleted by the sudden presence of livestock.<sup>62</sup>

By the late 1830s, violence on the frontier was also becoming endemic, particularly in the Melton region, as Kulin people fought to defend their land and traditions.<sup>63</sup> Skirmishes, attacks and violent reprisals increasingly became part of life in the colony. One such event occurred at Mount Cottrell in 1836, when aspiring squatter Charles Franks and his shepherd, Thomas Flinders, were found murdered by the blows of a steel hatchet.<sup>64</sup>

Franks' ransacked stores pointed to the culpability of local Aboriginal people and a party of

**Wool bales being transported by horse and cart. Wool was an important early industry in the district, but the introduction of hundreds of thousands of livestock with the arrival of the first squatters in Port Phillip had a devastating impact on the natural environment and on Aboriginal ways of life.**

E. Warner. State Library Victoria, H88.11/8



at least seventeen men comprising eight colonists, four Sydney Aborigines and five Port Phillip Aborigines was formed to seek retribution. A calculated reprisal attack was launched on a band of Wathaurong families camped nearby.<sup>65</sup> At least ten Aboriginal people were killed in this attack, though Wathaurong accounts put the number of dead as high as thirty-five.<sup>66</sup> First Nations people in Melton today share stories of other massacre events in the area that may not necessarily appear on the historical record.

Other means of violence were also inflicted on Aboriginal people by rogue settlers intent on taking matters into their own hands. Settler Ned Wedge gave an account of the fate of groups of Aboriginal people in the Werribee area: 'Oh, they all disappeared one night; they stole a bag of flour containing arsenic; their yells could be heard a mile off'.<sup>67</sup>

Kulin people regularly attacked livestock, particularly as their own food sources were starting

to disappear. These acts could result in death or imprisonment.<sup>68</sup> Kulin people also attacked settlers. In April 1838, a group of forty to fifty Aboriginal men went on a raid with the intention 'to kill sheep'.<sup>69</sup> Their first target was the Mount Aitken station and its hated namesake. A struggle ensued and John Aitken was attacked. The group continued killing and dispersing sheep on different properties around Sunbury and Werribee over the following days. One of these men was the Wurundjeri warrior Bunja Logan or Tullamarine (Dullamarin), a famous fighter for his people.<sup>70</sup>

Frontier conflict continued unabated over the years that followed. Early settler John Hunter Patterson wrote to the governor from Bacchus Marsh on 15 August 1853, describing the local Aboriginal people as 'so troublesome as not to be pacified'. Patterson and other settlers met with 'determined ferocity' and the conflict ended in the death of a number of Aboriginal people.<sup>71</sup>

There were also moments of compassion towards the original Kulin custodians of the land. At Exford, Simon Staughton provided a kind of refuge to surviving Aboriginal people and, unlike other pastoralists, allowed displaced groups to work on his land for rations. Other large landowners at Toolern Vale were sympathetic to the Aboriginal people. The Moylan and Browne families, concerned that the pre-existing remains of Aboriginal people should be properly respected, independently arranged for them to be interred in the Melton Cemetery. This portion of the cemetery is unmarked.<sup>72</sup> The Moylan family is also known to have encouraged local Aborigines to continue to use a traditional 'camping ground' at Mount Kororoit.<sup>73</sup>

One other chapter in the decimation of the Aboriginal population during the first years of colonisation in Victoria came in the form of disease. There is strong evidence suggesting that up to half of the Victorian Aboriginal population succumbed to smallpox spread by people from Indonesia even before the arrival of Europeans on their lands. However, by 1839, fears of outright extinction were raised because of the numbers of Kulin people suffering from syphilis, typhus, bronchial disease, dysentery and tuberculosis.<sup>74</sup> The introduction of alcohol had a similarly devastating effect on Aboriginal health and ways of life.<sup>75</sup>

Within a few years of the European incursion onto Kulin lands, local tribes were destitute and facing annihilation. As early as 1838, the Kurun jang balug were reduced to just small group of survivors that were forced to seek refuge with neighbouring Kulin clans.<sup>76</sup>

Unable to ignore the presence of these dispossessed people, the colonial authorities began to contrive means of managing the remaining Aboriginal people under various state protection laws and within a system of missions and reserves. Individual missions were established, and







later, the Port Phillip Protectorate, all of which sought to remove Kulin survivors from the rapidly expanding European settler community. European cultural superiority maintained that Aboriginal people could be both protected and civilised by being moved into designated areas and provided with education and religious instruction. As one colonial judge recommended to the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Richard Bourke, missions and 'black villages' were needed to provide Aboriginal people with 'the enjoyments and security of a civilized life'.<sup>77</sup>

The system of Aboriginal missions and reserves that was introduced during this period would come to define the lives of many Victorian Aboriginal people into the twentieth century.<sup>78</sup>

### The winds of change

The speed of pastoral settlement in Port Phillip's interior was startling, making it one of the fastest land occupations in the history of empires, as sheep and their European keepers spread over the central third of Victoria in less than a decade to 1845.<sup>79</sup>

During the 1830s and 1840s, the grasslands, waterways and woodlands of the area known today as the City of Melton underwent a transformation. After at least 60,000 years of occupation, the people of the Kulin Nation's ability to live in freedom, manage their environment, enact their spiritual universe and pass their cultural knowledge between generations, was coming to an end. In just a handful of years, Woi Wurrung, Boon Wurrung and Wathaurong people would see their food sources depleted, their customary practices disrupted, their families broken apart and countless lives lost.

Yet the rapid forays onto this land by strange settlers, with their sheep and their fences, were merely the first small steps in what would become a new order. With the discovery of gold outside of Ballarat in 1851, one the most frenzied rushes for wealth in history was underway, and with it came a deluge of newcomers seeking their piece of the bounty. The gold rush would see the newly established city of Melbourne inundated with people and prosperity, and would bring the village of Melton to life. Gold would be the catalyst for the next phase in the life of the district.



**An Aboriginal family from the Bacchus Marsh area, c. 1878. They are likely from the Wathaurong or Woi Wurrung language groups.**

Photographer Fred Kruger. State Library Victoria, H41139/84

**OPPOSITE**  
**Coranderrk Aboriginal Station, near Healesville, c.1880. This was one of several reserves established to manage the increasing conflict occurring between settlers and the growing population of dispossessed Aboriginal people in Port Phillip.**

Photographer Fred Kruger. State Library Victoria, H33802/21

RESERVE FOR THE EXTENSION OF THE VILLAGE



Village of  
**MELTON**

**N<sup>o</sup> 54**

*alt. 182 lbs 14 for road  
1861-1862  
26/8/66*

## CHAPTER 3

# A Community Emerges

1850–1900



*It must be nearly 50 years ago since I first remember Melton – a little hamlet by the roadside, in a thick virgin forest, on the Toolam Toolern creek about a mile from the line where plain and forest met. Giant box, gum and messmate on every hand; and the rich golden bloom of the wattle gave the place a very beautiful appearance, while the natives were still fairly plentiful between it and the Werribee.<sup>1</sup>*

J.L.R., 1905

1850–1900

**1 THE LAND**  
Dreamtime to 1835

**2 DIVERGENT STORIES**  
1835 to 1850

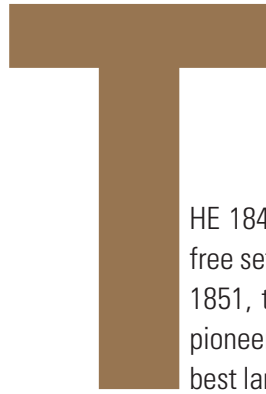
**3 A COMMUNITY EMERGES**  
1850 to 1900  
Population in 1865: 1,000

**4 TRANSFORMATIONS**  
1900 to 1940  
Population in 1919: 1,700

**5 OPEN FOR PROGRESS**  
1940 to 1980  
Population in 1973: 9,500

**6 A CITY FOR THE FUTURE**  
1980 to 2018  
Population in 2016: 135,443





THE 1840S SAW THE BEGINNINGS of a strong pastoralist identity developing among Victoria's free settlers, with the establishment of estates such as Exford, Green Hills and Mount Aitken. By 1851, the early squatters had occupied almost all the useable land in Victoria.<sup>2</sup> Those early pioneers that arrived in the Melton district took up acreage and established pastoral runs on the best land they could find, such as along the waterways of the Kororoit Creek and the Penny Royal Creek (later Toolam Toolern Creek and now known as Toolern Creek).<sup>3</sup> This led to a long history of conflict with the local Wathaurung, Boon Wurrung, Bunurong and Wurundjeri people, who previously hunted, harvested and lived on these lands. But the influx of people to the district in the 1850s, lured by the search for gold, as well as the wealth that the discovery of gold brought with it, meant that a new land struggle soon emerged.

#### PREVIOUS PAGES

**A map of the village of Melton, c. 1850s.**

Vale Collection, State Library Victoria

**William Daley established a boot making business in High Street in 1865. The sign on the left of the photograph advertises 'BRAN, OATS, CHAFF SOLD HERE'. This building was later transformed into a haberdashery by William's daughter Lizzie.**

Edna (Myers) Barrie collection

#### **A question of land**

The increasing population in Victoria, coupled with the desire of many to start agricultural endeavours of their own, put pressure on the government to address the question of land. The squatters of the early 1830s and 1840s had, by the 1850s, huge pastoral runs occupying the most fertile and productive tracts of land. Four men owned most of the Port Phillip area: William John Turner Clarke, Simon Staughton and the Chirnside brothers, Andrew and Thomas.<sup>4</sup>

William John Turner Clarke – known as 'Big' Clarke – caused a major upset to the early pastoralists in the district, as well as the administration of Port Phillip, when in August 1850 he applied to purchase 20,000 acres of land in Sunbury, citing an unused provision in the 1842 Imperial Land Act.<sup>5</sup> Local pastoralists, including William Yuille, were strongly opposed to Clarke's 'Special Survey', as it adversely affected their current and future land holdings. In September

1850, two of the squatters who were to be 'prejudicially affected' by Clarke's application, forwarded a petition to the governor that said:

We have little doubt that the Governor will either refuse to grant the land or admit the claim at £2 an acre. It is not incumbent upon him to grant it at £1 an acre; indeed, he has the power to charge any sum he thinks fit. Now as those interested are prepared to give more than twice the upset price for the land it is supposed the Governor cannot give it to Mr Clarke at less than £2 an acre.<sup>6</sup>

Other papers, however, supported Clarke's right to purchase land this way and cited 'the interests of the Colony as well as justice to the purchaser, must make the advantages of private parties succumb'.<sup>7</sup> Clarke was successful in his application, despite the considerable opposition, and purchased 31,317 acres of land for £1 an acre.<sup>8</sup> This land holding was quadrupled, as Clarke was entitled to lease three times the area of purchased land for grazing. Known as 'grass-right', this was disastrous for other pastoralists, like William Yuille, James Pinkerton, the Pykes and the Bateys, who were pushed out and in some cases, ruined.<sup>9</sup> Clarke continued his land expansion during the 1850s, and extended his Special Survey south-westward purchasing large tracts of land around Mount Cottrell, Rockbank, Truganina and along Kororoit Creek.<sup>10</sup>

This made it almost impossible for newcomers (many of them failed gold diggers wishing to start farming in the district) to purchase land of their own. The squatters' monopoly over land caused deep resentment among the small-scale farmers who petitioned the government to change the laws around land ownership and break up the huge pastoral runs dominating the landscape. The wealthy and influential 'squattocracy' did all they could to block measures in parliament that would limit their land ownership, but the introduction of freehold land tenure in the 1850s, followed by the Nicholson Land Act 1860, meant that the land occupied by squatters was opened up, surveyed and put to auction.<sup>11</sup>

Some squatters, like Simon Staughton, were able to buy the freehold to their land when it came up for auction. Despite the restrictions that the Act of 1860 put on the amount of land one individual could own, many squatters were able to retain the best areas of their original runs by paying dummy bidders to purchase the land and then sell it back to them.<sup>12</sup> Staughton's Exford run was close to 100,000 acres when he died in 1863.<sup>13</sup> Another squatter, John Aitken, was less



**William John Turner Clarke was a prominent landowner in the early Melton district. Clarke's 'Special Survey' allowed him to purchase 20,000 acres of land in Sunbury in 1850, extending his landholdings to include land around Mount Cottrell, Rockbank, Truganina and Kororoit Creek.**

State Library Victoria, H5056/A

1850-1900

successful in retaining his entire run, but still owned 4000 acres freehold by the time of his death soon after 1858.<sup>14</sup> William John Turner Clarke continued to amass huge amounts of land in the district by purchasing large tracts of plains land, as well as smaller farms when their owners struggled to turn a profit.<sup>15</sup> Dry seasons, floods and fires caused many smaller scale farmers to sell up. Alexander Cameron recalled the particularly dry season of 1861-65:

The season being dry, with no feed or water, compelled the small farmers to sell their holdings, which went into the Rockbank Estate.<sup>16</sup>

By the time of his death in 1874, Clarke owned 136,310 acres of land in Victoria, covering what is now Sunshine, Tarneit, Balliang, Rockbank, Diggers Rest, Sunbury, Bolinda Vale and across the Hume Highway.

The introduction of freehold land tenure in the 1850s and changes brought about by the Nicholson Land Act of 1860 not only transformed the landscape of the district, but also altered the nature of the agricultural industry. Prior to this, large-scale pastoral farming operations, the majority of which were sheep farms, were predominant during the 1840s. The demand for food and supplies on the goldfields meant that, during the 1850s, the district began producing a range of agricultural products, including dairy, vegetables, poultry and pigs. Farmers either sold their produce to travellers on the road, or transported it themselves to the goldfields.<sup>17</sup>

**This image from a wood engraving shows gold miners travelling the long road across the Keilor Plains to the diggings. It was published in the *Illustrated London News* in 1853.**

J.A. Gilfillan. State Library Victoria, H25126





# The pound-keeper

By the 1850s, with the introduction of freehold land and the rush of people through the Melton district as a result of the gold rush, some pastoralists began to look at ways to improve security on their properties, to protect their land and their stock. Homesteads, woolsheds and fences began to appear across the landscape.<sup>18</sup> A pound-keeper was also introduced to help regulate and control stock. The pound-keeper's role was to impound any lost, stray or escaped livestock. Impounded animals were advertised and if the owners came forward, they were charged a fine, as well as the cost of the animal's feed and keep for the time it was impounded. Unclaimed animals were sold at auction.

The first pound-keeper was appointed to the Melton district in 1851.<sup>19</sup> However, a pound site was not established for the Melton district until 1854, when George Scarborough from Mount Cottrell was appointed pound-keeper. A pound site was established on the Djerriwarrh Creek.<sup>20</sup> The first female pound-keeper was appointed when Catherine Williams applied for the post her husband held before his death in 1862.<sup>21</sup> The pound was moved near the boundary of the Braybrook Roads Board on Toolern Creek. During the 1860s, The Willows homestead was built to the west of the pound, and it remained part of The Willows homestead site until 1885, when the pound was moved once again.<sup>22</sup>

A number of individuals held the post of pound-keeper over the years. While the role of the pound-keeper has changed, the need for regulation of animals in the City of Melton has remained. These days it is usually straying cats and dogs that are impounded, rather than horses, cows and sheep.

## Gold

The crowd at the counter was three if not four deep, the landlord with a brace of assistants drew liquor as fast as possible which those in the front rank passed to those behind. The outsiders, giving their orders, threw their shillings over the heads of those that stood before them.<sup>23</sup>

These words, recorded by local resident Isaac Batey, describe a typical scene at the Diggers Rest Hotel during the mid-1850s. The discovery of gold and the rush that followed had a profound effect on the development of Melbourne and Victoria. The massive influx of immigrants arriving daily in Port Phillip Bay saw the colony's population jump from just under 100,000 in 1851 to almost 170,000 by 1852.<sup>24</sup> By the time the Diggers Rest Hotel was built in 1854, census data recorded 283,942 people in Victoria, thousands of them at or on their way to the goldfields.<sup>25</sup> The Diggers Rest Hotel was just one of many wayside inns and hotels that sprang up along Mount Alexander Road from Melbourne to Bendigo (now the Calder Highway) in response to the needs of the thousands of men, women and children travelling to the goldfields in Castlemaine and

**Hopeful gold prospectors leave Flemington on the road to the Bendigo goldfields, c. 1856.**

Artist Samuel Charles Brees. State Library Victoria, H17071

**OPPOSITE**

**Chinese miners leaving Castlemaine for the goldfields in a Cobb & Co. coach, c. 1888. Cobb & Co. was founded in 1853 to offer fast, efficient travel to the goldfields. With staging posts every ten miles between Melbourne and Bendigo, the journey to the goldfields, for those who could afford it, became much more manageable until the railway line was completed in 1862.**

State Library Victoria, H2407





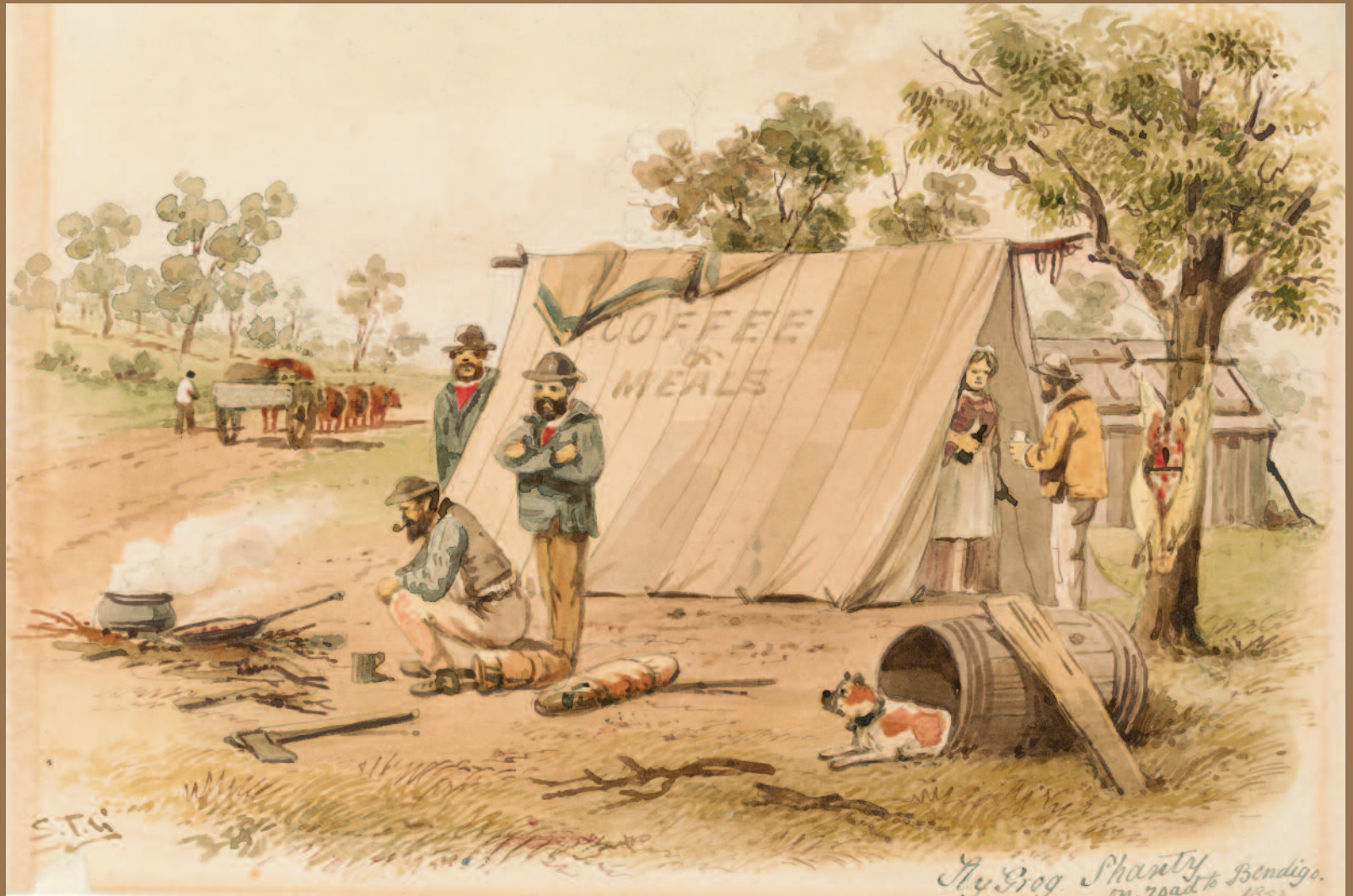
1850-1900





*On Road to Bendigo.  
1852*





1850-1900

#### PREVIOUS

**Depicting the road to Bendigo in 1852, this painting shows that travelling to the goldfields was arduous and tough. Wayside inns and hotels provided much needed sustenance and often opportunities to repair wagons and carts.**

S.T. Gill. State Library Victoria, H24546

**The sheer number of travellers along the roads to the goldfields necessitated the establishment of wayside inns, hotels and 'coffee tents'. These 'coffee tents' supplied liquor unlicensed, as part of the sly-grog trade along the road and at the goldfields.**

S.T. Gill. State Library Victoria, H25975

Bendigo. The Diggers Rest Hotel was especially unique among these wayside hotels, as it was one of only a few that appeared on maps created during the 1850s.<sup>26</sup>

The trail to the diggings along Mount Alexander Road was crowded and treacherous. Accounts of the road's terrible conditions – 'knee-deep in dust ... gored all over with ruts and holes' in summer and 'turned to quagmires' in winter – indicate that a journey to the goldfields was a memorable experience.<sup>27</sup>

One journalist described how crowded the road was, writing in May 1852:

To say that innumerable drays, vans, cars, carts and wagons, covered the road, would not convey to you any idea of the actual thing ... With little exaggeration, I may say that they formed one continuous line from the Diggings to Melbourne.<sup>28</sup>

The sheer number of people travelling each day, combined with the difficult conditions along the way, necessitated the establishment of wayside inns and hotels, not only for the sustenance of travellers, but for the care and repair of the livestock and wagons that travelled with them. These wayside inns and 'coffee tents' (which were unlicensed but often supplied liquor as part of the sly-grog trade) were established at frequent intervals along the road to the diggings. One estimate found thirteen licensed hotels along the 40 kilometres between the towns of Keilor and Gisborne; an average of one every three kilometres.<sup>29</sup>

Beattys Road, which was first called Ballarat Road, was established in 1851 as a road to the Ballarat goldfields.<sup>30</sup> Sometime between 1852 and 1853, the Rockbank Inn was constructed on this road, offering road-weary fortune-seekers a spot of respite between Melbourne and the goldfields of Ballarat.<sup>31</sup> Author, barrister and gold miner William Kelly visited the hotel in 1854 and was impressed by the resident talking magpie, who was reputed to provide a good imitation of 'drunken diggers'.<sup>32</sup> That same year, on their way to quash the rebels at Eureka, Sir Robert Nickle and his troops stopped at the Rockbank Inn, where they described the local drink as 'sour, squashy and disagreeable', leaving some of the party in 'excruciating pain and suffering'.<sup>33</sup>

During the early years of the gold rush, establishments like the Diggers Rest Hotel were the most dominant feature on the landscape. Often standing two storeys high, these wayside inns distinguished themselves from the hotels on the actual goldfields, with the addition of stables and blacksmiths for the maintenance and repair of the many carts and wagons passing by.<sup>34</sup> When



Cobb & Co. was founded in 1853, it established staging posts about every ten miles between Melbourne and Bendigo, to enable drivers to change horses frequently and maintain a fast pace for the entire journey.<sup>35</sup> Changing stations were established at hotels in Keilor, Gisborne, Woodend, and at the Diggers Rest Hotel.<sup>36</sup>

The government was slow to make improvements to the roads leading to the goldfields, despite the huge sums of gold being delivered to Melbourne daily. By 1855, a 'monster petition' was presented to the Governor of Victoria Charles Hotham at Government House, requesting improvements to Mount Alexander Road, which was 'regarded as the great artery of colonial traffic'.<sup>37</sup> This petition, measuring 120 yards in length and containing over 10,000 signatures, told of accidents 'of daily occurrence' and 'incalculable loss from the bad conditions of the road'.<sup>38</sup> There were at least nine roadside graves recorded at Diggers Rest, belonging to travellers who encountered misfortune on route to the goldfields.<sup>39</sup> Robert Thomas recorded his experience of arriving at Diggers Rest sick and exhausted after crossing the Keilor Plains: 'had I died there I should probably have been laid in a grave by the roadside without a tombstone to mark the spot which would soon be forgotten'.<sup>40</sup>

One grave that was not forgotten was that of American digger Jack Sanger. On 12 May 1855, Sanger and his companion were crushed to death when the dray they were sleeping under fell on top of them. A grave was erected with the simple epitaph:

J A Sanger, Woodstock, USA  
May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1855  
Aged 24 years<sup>41</sup>

In 1992, during a property subdivision, Sanger's grave was relocated and currently sits in a reserve along with a monument to aviator Harry Houdini, on the south side of the old Calder Highway between the Diggers Rest Hotel and the railway station.<sup>42</sup>

While few tangible reminders of the gold rush remain, there is significant evidence of the ways in which this phenomenon radically shaped the future of the City of Melton. The Djerriwarrh Bridge was constructed in 1858 and still stands today as a solid reminder of the impact that the gold rush had on the landscape. Before its construction, travellers made the dangerous river crossing warily. John Chandler recorded his experience of crossing with a dray in 1851:



**Construction began on the Djerriwarrh Bridge in late 1858. Using local sandstone that was quarried onsite, the bridge was completed in 1859 and provided a much safer crossing for those travelling from Melbourne to Ballarat, at least until 1889 when the Melbourne to Ballarat railway line was established.**

Photographer Albert Arnell. State Library Victoria, H2013.48/19



... tied a rope to the back of the dray, and all hands hung on with all their might to keep the dray from overpowering the horse. We saw several carts that had come to grief, quite smashed at the bottom of the hill.<sup>43</sup>

Construction on the Djerrivarrh Bridge began in late 1858, using local sandstone that was quarried onsite. The bridge was completed in 1859 and provided a much safer crossing for those travelling from Melbourne to Ballarat, at least until 1889 when the Melbourne to Ballarat railway line was established.<sup>44</sup>

By the mid-1850s, the initial rush that had been driven by easily mined alluvial gold was coming to an end. As miners began searching for gold deeper within the earth, there were fewer and fewer travellers taking to the road each day. The Mount Alexander railway was completed in 1862, and sounded the death knell for many of the wayside inns and hotels. Cobb & Co. cancelled its coach service between Melbourne and Bendigo and many hotels closed their doors.<sup>45</sup>

The Diggers Rest Hotel and the Rockbank Inn both survived the end of the gold rush, unlike many other wayside inns. With the advent of motor cars during the early twentieth century, the Diggers Rest Hotel capitalised on the increased traffic on the Calder Highway, making alterations to better suit the needs of these new motorised travellers.<sup>46</sup> As the only known surviving example of a roadside hotel built during the gold rush, the Diggers Rest Hotel is recognised by the City of Melton as a significant heritage site.<sup>47</sup>

William Dalrymple Keating operated the Rockbank Inn for 14 years from 1856. Keating organised local horse races and the inn became a meeting place for sportsmen.<sup>48</sup> In 1870, the hotel and 20 acres of surrounding land were auctioned. For the following 90 years, it was home to the Beatty and later Trethowan families. The building fell into ruin from the 1960s. Today, the bluestone ruins of the original hotel, stables and storerooms are being retained in a public park beside Kororoit Creek.<sup>49</sup>

### **Making history with satisfying speed**

Many of the townships of the Melton district emerged as a result of the gold rush. Although it was already known as a stopping point along the way to the Ballarat and Bendigo goldfields, the land sales of the 1850s and 1860s provided the impetus for community development in and around



the small settlement of Melton.<sup>50</sup> The Temperance Hotel and the Melton Hotel were established in 1851, followed by the Ben Nevis on the Djerriwarrh Creek west of Melton around 1854 and the Lord Raglan in 1855.<sup>51</sup> The Melton Hotel was remembered by one local as ‘hurriedly put together in good time, the bricks being able to be cut with a knife and loam used as mortar’.<sup>52</sup>

Unlike the Melton Hotel, which was in a very dilapidated state by the late 1860s, several other original hotel buildings erected in the nineteenth century survived much longer.<sup>53</sup> The Monmouthshire Hotel in Diggers Rest, built in 1844, was another important stopping place for diggers headed to the goldfields, but was demolished in 1961 to make way for a Mobil service station.<sup>54</sup> The Rose and Crown hotel established by the Missen family on Ballarat Road, Rockbank in the 1870s, was used as a residence following its closure in 1911, and is today the office building of the Sundowner Caravan Park.<sup>55</sup> While the original Golden Fleece Hotel building, constructed in 1865, was demolished during the 1970s, the Golden Fleece still exists as a thriving local pub today.<sup>56</sup> Mac’s Hotel was originally a butcher shop owned by George Minns in the 1860s, but was soon transformed into a popular watering hole known as the Minns’ Hotel. Sometime after George Minns’ death, the hotel passed into new ownership, and the name was changed from Minns’ to Mac’s. While the original building was demolished in the 1970s, Mac’s remains a popular spot in Melton today. A small bluestone cairn in the front garden is a reminder of the hotel’s long history.<sup>57</sup>

### A double life

Irish immigrant Ellen Tremayne attracted notoriety while sailing to Australia on the ship *Ocean Monarch*, for wearing both male and female clothes and forming ‘intimate friendships’ with her cabin mates, particularly Irish governess Mary Delahunty. After arriving in the colony in June 1856, Ellen was employed as a domestic servant at a hotel in Melton. This was short-lived, however, and Ellen soon left for Melbourne, assuming the name Edward De Lacy Evans, dressing in male clothing and marrying Mary Delahunty at a church in Lonsdale Street.<sup>58</sup>

The couple moved to Blackwood, north-west of Bacchus Marsh, where Mary opened a school. However, she left Edward and married another man in 1862. Edward went on to marry twice more and worked as a labourer around Blackwood, Bendigo and Stawell. When he was admitted to the Kew Asylum in 1879, Edward’s true gender was discovered and the sensational story spread widely in the local and international press.<sup>59</sup>

#### OPPOSITE

**This image from a c. 1910 postcard shows remnants of the original Melton settlement on the flat where the golf course is now located. The tree still stands over Toolern Creek.**

Edna (Myers) Barrie collection

**The Minns’ Hotel, the bluestone building in this photograph, was originally a butcher shop, before owner George Minns transformed it into a hotel. It later became known as Mac’s Hotel, which remains a popular place in Melton today.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 405





**Edward De Lacy Evans, dressed as a woman on the left, and as a man on the right, in 1879, the same year he was admitted to the Kew Asylum. Evans is said to have lived and worked in Melton prior to this.**

Photographer Nicholas White. State Library Victoria, H96.160/147

Some early chroniclers of Melton's history told a different version of events, recounting that Ellen had initially been employed by a local dairyman, Robert Liddle, before returning from Melbourne as 'a "married man"' named Ned and with a 'supposed wife'. The *Bacchus Marsh Express* claimed in 1879, as the mystery of Edward De Lacy Evans filled the newspapers, that after their marriage Edward and Mary had lived in tents and worked on various properties in the district for several years.<sup>60</sup>

As well as places for food and lodging, the young township of Melton soon boasted blacksmiths, a bootmaker, bakery and a butcher in its High Street.<sup>61</sup> A post office was opened in 1856, handling almost 9,000 letters and over 7,500 newspapers in 1860.<sup>62</sup> By 1867, one newspaper reported that Melton was 'well supplied with hotels, stores and tradesmen of all kinds – especially boot and shoe makers'. Based on the way the town was developing, the newspaper continued, 'Melton is making history with satisfactory speed'.<sup>63</sup>

But the speed of development and the increasing population in the district put a strain on natural resources and caused conflict with the people of the Kulin Nation. The history that was being made regarding the future of Melton's first people was one of heartbreak, disease, death and destruction. Author John Chandler noted:

There was a tribe of blacks came to Melton and held a corroboree, and this was the last time I saw a whole tribe together; this was in 1863. Alas! Poor things, they are all gone now.<sup>64</sup>

Many Aboriginal people had, by the 1860s, been driven from their homelands or forced onto missions or reserves, but there were some that worked and lived on pastoral stations and farms, farmed their own smallholdings or worked in the local fishing, mining and timber industries.<sup>65</sup> Alexander Cameron made a record in his memoirs of a small number of Aboriginal people working as labourers at Staughton's Exford property. Paid in rations and sometimes silver, Cameron recalls they 'did a lot of brush fencing for sheep yards and division fencing'.<sup>66</sup> It was a far cry from the cohesive, sustainable and free lifestyle they were used to.

Local resident Anders Hjorth later recalled in his memoirs that the residents of Melton and

the surrounding townships were 'early imbued with religious fervour' and the construction of places of worship closely followed the hotels.<sup>67</sup> A combined Protestant church was the first church to be built in Melton. Constructed in 1857 from timber, it was described as 'built in such an unsubstantial and flimsy manner ... [that] two or three stout box props had to be put on the east side ... to prevent it being blown over by the west and south-west winds'.<sup>68</sup> With seating for 100 people, the church was a place of worship for all denominations in the district, as well as serving as a schoolhouse during the week.<sup>69</sup> In Bacchus Marsh, a prefabricated iron church was imported from England, at a cost of £1,000, to serve the spiritual needs of the community.<sup>70</sup> The Presbyterian community in Melton began construction of their own church in 1865 and Scots' Church, as it was then known, opened in December 1867.<sup>71</sup> Built of bluestone, Scots' Church had a slate roof, a ceiling that was constructed for the 'greatest possible loftiness for ventilation' and 'strong, roomy' seats.<sup>72</sup> The windows were described as 'particularly elegant, especially the principal one ... which is fitted with stained glass of a very rich description'.<sup>73</sup> Now known as the Presbyterian Church or Melton Uniting Church, it is one of only two remaining nineteenth century bluestone churches in the City of Melton.<sup>74</sup>



**LEFT**  
**The Township of Melton in the Parish of Djerrivarrh, County of Bourke, 1857.**

Michael Callanan, Assistant Surveyor, Crown Lands Office, Melbourne. James A. Philp, Lithographer. State Library Victoria

**NEXT PAGE, MARGIN**  
**The Presbyterian Church of Melton is one of only two nineteenth century bluestone churches remaining in the City of Melton today. Construction began in 1865 and by December 1867, Scots' Church (as it was then known) was open for services.**

J.T. Collins Collection. State Library Victoria, H98.250/163

**In 1864 the foundation stone for Melton's Christ Church was laid by local resident Martha Staughton. Funding for the completion of the church stalled and for a number of years, congregants attended services on the dirt floor. The church was finally completed and officially consecrated in 1872.**

J.T. Collins Collection. State Library Victoria, H98.250/152

**The foundation stone for St John Chrysostom's Church was laid in 1876 and the building was dedicated the following year by Archbishop James Alipius Goold. The church's name was later changed to St Dominic's.**

Melton & District Historical Society



In 1867, the *Bacchus Marsh Express* reported on the opening of several new churches in the Melton district, noting that the Presbyterian, Wesleyan and Church of England congregations had all recently erected their own buildings.<sup>75</sup>

The foundation stone for the new Church of England building was laid by local resident Martha Staughton in 1864. A donation of £200 from the estate of Melton pioneer and Martha's father, Simon Staughton, initiated the project.<sup>76</sup> However, after the original funds were exhausted, construction slowed and further public subscription was needed to complete the roof and floor. Finally, on 29 January 1869, Melton's Christ Church held its first service. The bluestone building was officially consecrated in October 1872. The Staughton family maintained their connection to the church, donating a chancel and stained glass windows in 1903 in memory of Captain Samuel Thomas Staughton.<sup>77</sup>



In March 1877, the Roman Catholic church of St John Chrysostom's (later renamed St Dominic's) opened, adding – as one newspaper reported – 'considerably to the appearance of Melton'.<sup>78</sup> In the two decades that followed the discovery of gold, the district had gone from holding religious services in the Temperance Hotel to having more than four completed church buildings for the growing population of 1,243.<sup>79</sup>







**Gottfried and Marie Jongebloed and family outside the Jongebloed store, c. 1900.**

Courtesy Shane Jongebloed

**OPPOSITE, MAIN**

The 1857 timber Combined Protestant Church (on the right) was the first church to be built in Melton. The bluestone Scots' Church, which opened in 1867, can be seen in the far back left of the photograph. The district's churches were important gathering places for the community.

Melton & District Historical Society

# Hannah ‘Grannie’ Watts

*On Friday 21st October passed away one of Melton’s most interesting and honoured residents in the person of Mrs Hannah Watts, familiarly and affectionately called Grannie Watts.*

*Gisborne Gazette, 28 October 1921*

Hannah ‘Grannie’ Watts is one of Melton’s most celebrated and cherished pioneers. Born in Ireland in 1831, Hannah immigrated to Australia with her husband George Byrns in 1854. Moving to Melton, they built a wattle and daub hut home where they lived with their four children until George was tragically killed in 1860. Unusually for the time, Hannah purchased land in her own name in the Melton township in 1863. Later that same year she married William Watts and together they moved to Toolern Vale and built a bluestone and mud brick home.<sup>80</sup>

It is believed that while travelling to Australia, Hannah assisted the ship surgeon and demonstrated a natural aptitude for the tasks assigned to her. When she was living in Melton she assisted other women in an unofficial capacity as neighbourhood midwife, while also working on her farm and raising her six children. By 1887, however, her reputation as a midwife had grown to such an extent that she was able to establish her own practice.<sup>81</sup>

William Watts died in 1874, but Hannah remained in Toolern Vale for the next twenty years. In 1894, she moved into the Melton township and built Lynch Cottage on the corner of Yuille and Sherwin streets, near Toolern Vale Creek.<sup>82</sup> There she assisted in the births of hundreds of Melton residents, as well as the laying out of the deceased. Meticulous in her record keeping, Hannah Watts recorded the details of a total of 442 births between the years 1886 and 1921. Lynch Cottage was officially registered as a private hospital in 1911 and Hannah was listed in the Victorian Register of Midwives in 1917.<sup>83</sup>

Hannah Watts died on 21 October 1921, a few months after she assisted with the delivery of her final baby, Thomas Watts Minns.<sup>84</sup> She was 90 years old. Hannah was buried in Melton Cemetery and mourned by the Melton community. Her obituary in the *Gisborne Gazette* is a testament to how beloved she was by the people she served:

... while in the absence of medical aid residents looked to Grannie as their doctor, philosopher and friend. Hundreds, in fact we might say thousands of people held the deceased in veneration ... A woman of great energy and determination combined with superior intelligence, Grannie conquered difficulties that would have made many falter...<sup>85</sup>

Today Grannie Watts is remembered by her descendants and by many locals in the City of Melton. Created in 1985, Hannah Watts Park honours Grannie Watts' pioneering work for the health and wellbeing of hundreds of Meltonians. Not only is the park a fitting tribute to the memory of an outstanding citizen, it also continues to provide today's residents and visitors with a space to walk, relax, gather and celebrate in Melton.<sup>86</sup>



**Hannah Watts standing outside Lynch Cottage, where she assisted with the births of hundreds of babies.**

Library Collection, Melton City Council



### **Droughts and flooding rains**

Many of the buildings constructed in the early part of the nineteenth century were erected in haste and with building materials that did not stand the test of time, nor the destructive impact of bushfires that ravaged the district. The Black Thursday fires in 1851 caused death and destruction across the Colony of Victoria and set the ranges between Melton and Gisborne 'ablaze from end to end'.<sup>87</sup> John Chandler was a land selector living in Melton who recorded his experiences from 1854 to 1861. He wrote of one fire that tore through the district, 'leaping and rushing like an army':

... the stacks and the stables were all burnt in less time than it takes me to write this. They were so hot they seemed to burst out in a blaze all over.<sup>88</sup>

Anders Hjorth described the Black Monday fire that occurred a few years later:

... it was in February 1865, on a very hot day, with strong winds, that a fire swept down from the ranges on to the plains. It did not present a solid, broad front, but came down in narrow strips trending eastward to the Toolern Road ... the main body of the fire swept the plains down to Melton, burning out some farmers.<sup>89</sup>

The very dry climate of Melton led to it later becoming one of the leading producers of hay and chaff in Victoria. These Mallee-like conditions, however, have also meant that fire and drought have been recurring concerns for the local population. Water was an immediate priority for everyone who lived and travelled across the plains of the Melton district in the early days of settlement, but by the 1860s it had become *the* topic of conversation. Anders Hjorth remembered:

The water supply was very deficient, a few had iron tanks, and some under-ground ones. After a lengthy spell of dry weather, the creek had to be depended on, and that supply often got exhausted near the village, but a mile to the south of it there was generally a good supply to be got in the creek.<sup>90</sup>

Large underground tanks, used to store water run-off from the roofs of nearby buildings, were a

distinctive part of many early farms in the district. Some of these structures remain in place today, reminders of the critical importance of water management for farmers on the dry Melton plains.<sup>91</sup>

During the second half of the nineteenth century, a variety of different schemes were attempted to establish a more reliable water supply to the growing townships of the Melton district. The local waterways, such as the Toolern Creek and Werribee River, were too unstable for the growing population to rely on. While there were a few privately constructed dams, one of the most significant attempts to solve Melton's water woes came in 1879, with the proposal for a reservoir. One exasperated journalist wrote:

What use can there be for roads if there is no water to quench the thirst of those who use them? If the place has to be abandoned, and becomes a howling wilderness, with our public edifices converted into wool-sheds, our habitations deserted ruins ... to the people of places like Melton ... large reservoirs are an imperative necessity, which must be constructed cost what they may, so that in exceptionally dry seasons the wants of all can be supplied without their being constantly engaged driving carts and stock to and from the Werribee and Kororoit creeks.<sup>92</sup>

**In early February 1851, bushfires spread across Victoria. The worst day was 6 February, which became known as Black Thursday. Close to 5 million hectares were burnt including the ranges between Melton and Gisborne. It would not be the last time fire would ravage Melton and its surrounds.**

William Strutt. State Library Victoria, H28049



Completed in 1882, it was hoped that the new reservoir would ‘turn out a work of great local importance’ as well as ‘a benefit to the travelling public’.<sup>93</sup> However, it was not the success that was anticipated, as just two years later a local delegation led by Alexander Blackwood appealed to the local council once more to:

... do all in their power to get a supply of water into the township, and let it cost what it may, the people should have water, if it was possible to obtain it, as the Reservoir did not seem to be likely to meet the demand.<sup>94</sup>

There were several other attempts at solving the water problem in the nineteenth century, including digging bores and constructing earthen dams. Due to shallow volcanic bedrock in some parts of the district, it was very difficult to excavate underground tanks. Some pastoral landowners, including the Clarkes, constructed dry stone wall dams across drainage lines on their properties in order to water stock.<sup>95</sup> Plumpton Dam on Plumpton Road, Diggers Rest was part of Clarke’s Rockbank Station and is the second largest known dry stone wall private pastoral dam in Victoria.<sup>96</sup> However, it would be more than sixty years before the residents of Melton and the surrounding districts had a reliable water source.

### **A circle of life**

By the 1860s, the settlement at Melton had grown considerably and the small towns in the surrounding district, including Diggers Rest, Toolern Vale and Bacchus Marsh, were also expanding.<sup>97</sup> By 1861, the district was in need of a cemetery. Local residents met at the Lord Raglan Hotel in April to elect trustees of the new Melton Cemetery. By November, the cemetery had its first internee – a three-week-old baby named John.<sup>98</sup> The first ten burials in the cemetery included seven children under twelve months. One was a young Aboriginal boy called Toybee.<sup>99</sup>

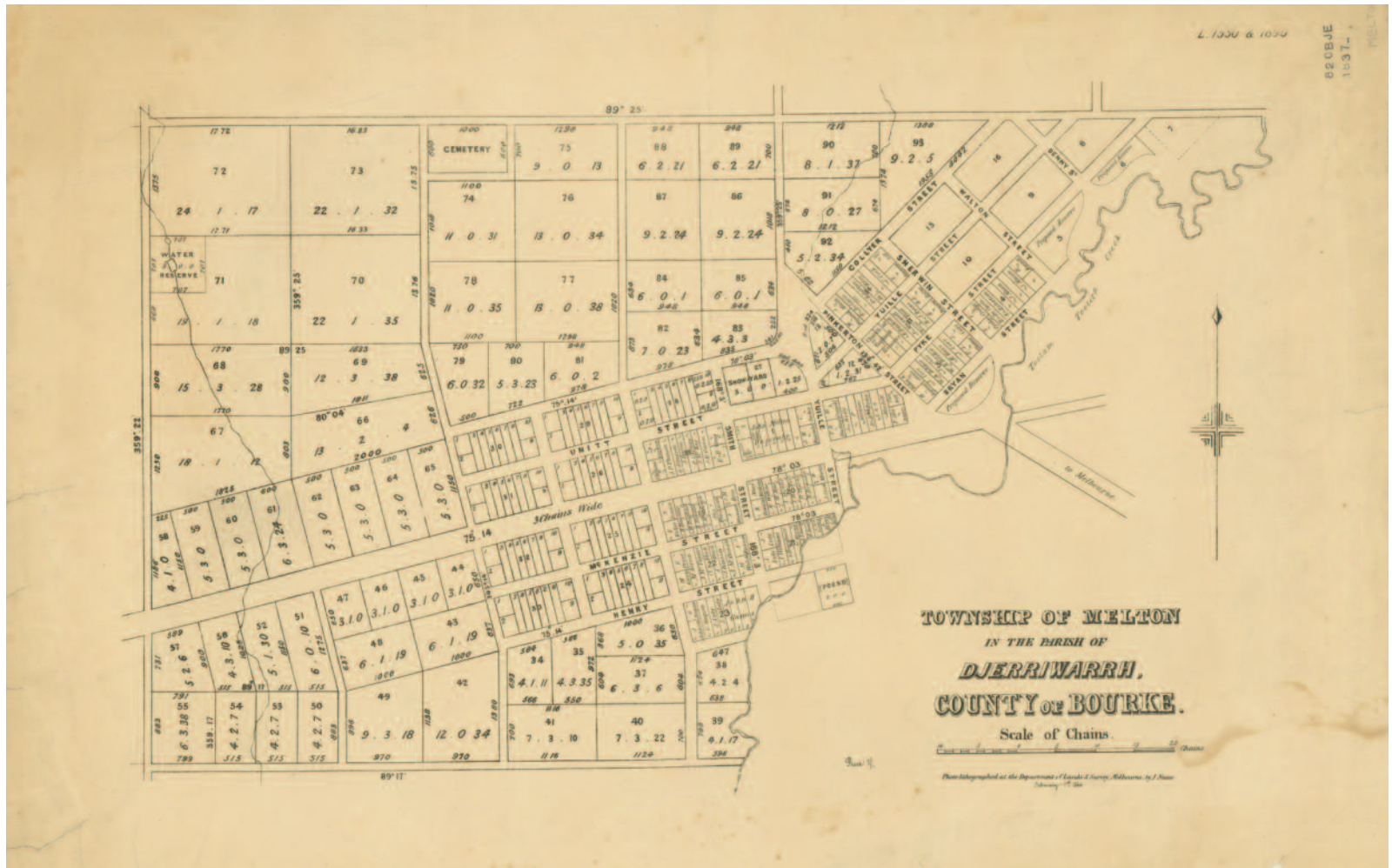
The cemetery became the final resting place of many of the district’s earliest squatters and residents, as well as a number of Kulin people.<sup>100</sup> Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, director of Melbourne’s Royal Botanic Gardens, chose plants to beautify the cemetery, recommending many exotic species that unfortunately failed to thrive in the extremely dry environment. But he did also suggest she-oaks, trees that were endemic to the area and dominated the landscape.<sup>101</sup> In



1867, just five years after the first burial was recorded, the cemetery was described as having been 'left in a state of nature'.<sup>102</sup> The observer added, 'the very strong growth of grass inside its fence endangers that erection by reason of its liability to be set on fire'.<sup>103</sup> It was a valid concern, as two years earlier a fire had indeed burned through the cemetery, destroying many of the wooden tombstones.<sup>104</sup>

**The Township of Melton, 1863. By that time, Melton had been declared a Roads District and the development of local infrastructure and services had begun.**

J. Noone, Department of Lands & Survey, Melbourne. State Library Victoria





### Three Irish sisters

Mary, Eliza and Ann Dowling arrived in Melbourne in June 1855. They came in search of opportunity in their new home, far away from a life of poverty and domestic service in Ireland. All three married and settled in Melton, chasing the promise of a life of the land, a life of independence and self-sufficiency. Ann's Crown Grant was in her own name – a rarity at that time. Although a note from the Office of Lands and Survey reads 'Mr Ann Dowling'. With her husband Henry Myers, Ann settled on the Ballarat Road (High Street) at Ryans Creek, which was known as Myers Gully. The three sisters had ten children between them who attended Melton State School No. 430.<sup>105</sup> One of Eliza Dowling's daughters, Lizzie Daley, inherited her father's bootmaking shop in Melton's High Street, which she converted into a haberdashery.<sup>106</sup>



With the increasing population in the district, there was a need for better care and development of the surrounding road to allow for the transportation of people, goods and services. The colonial government's strategy was to decentralise all aspects of road construction and maintenance to local groups.<sup>107</sup> In 1862, Melton was declared a Road District and at a meeting held at the Melton Hotel on 20 October 1862, residents elected by ballot ten members to form the Melton Road Board.<sup>108</sup> Road Districts were the forerunners to many shires and the Road Boards were in essence the beginnings of local government.<sup>109</sup> By 1865, the Melton Road District covered 73,600 acres, containing a population of 1,000 people and 212 dwellings.<sup>110</sup> By 1870, an office had been built for the Road Board. The building was considered an 'excellent addition to the town', especially because 'the whole of the work was executed by residents of the district'.<sup>111</sup> This remained the seat of local government in the district until 1958, when new shire offices were built.<sup>112</sup> In February 1871, the Melton Road Board passed a motion to declare Melton a shire. The Road Board then gave way to the Melton Shire Council, which held its first meeting on Saturday 8 April 1871 at the Monmouthshire Hotel in Diggers Rest. The location of council meetings thereafter alternated between Melton, Toolern Vale and Diggers Rest. The councillors present at the inaugural meeting were Browne (president), Clarke, Porter, Beattie, Baker, Ryan, Blackwood and Minns.<sup>113</sup>

As well as maintaining the roads to ensure safer passage and access throughout the district, local residents found themselves in need of a police station to help maintain law and order. Local

resident Alexander Blackwood donated a piece of land on Smith Street, adjacent to the Golden Fleece Hotel, for the construction of a police station. In 1875 a small bluestone cottage, Dunvegan, was built to accommodate the local constabulary. It featured four rooms, a veranda and a lock up out the back, and was built of corrugated iron, much to the local residents' distress, as the sound of boots banging against walls often echoed through the night.<sup>114</sup> It took much longer, however, for a court house to be established in the town. In August 1864, the first Court of Petty Sessions was held at the Melton Hotel.<sup>115</sup> The hotel was often used for judicial purposes, much to the dismay of one local correspondent, who wrote in the *Bacchus Marsh Express*:

... a sight of its crumbling walls ... is enough to inspire anything but awe for 'the seat of Justice'. No person would imagine, at a first inspection, that so costly a commodity as law should be dealt with in so shabby a building.<sup>116</sup>

A court house was finally built in Melton's High Street in 1892.<sup>117</sup>

As the district grew and more families began establishing themselves on pastoral lands and in emerging villages, the need for schools became apparent. However, the early historical record regarding schools in the district is incomplete. The fragile fortunes of the early settlers in the district are reflected in the number of rural schoolhouses that appeared, disappeared and re-appeared during the mid-nineteenth century. During this time, schools were established in Aitkens Gap (1857), Melton (1858), Kororoit (1862), Mount Atkinson (1868), Rockbank (1868), Toolern Vale (1869), Keilor Road Station (1873), Diggers Rest (1874), and Djerriwarrh Creek (1875).<sup>118</sup> In the 1850s, school children were taught in the Combined Protestant Church building, which doubled as a schoolhouse during the week.

The first school to be established in the Derrimut-Truganina district was located at the base of Mount Cottrell. It opened in 1859 under the guidance of school teacher John Corr.<sup>119</sup> There is some uncertainty about the history of this school. According to Joan Starr, it began on land belonging to the Wesleyan Church, and in 1864 a bluestone school and teacher's residence was constructed. Historian Leslie James Blake, however, reports there was a Church of England school at the base of Mount Cottrell.<sup>120</sup> The school closed in 1898, and remained so for the next two decades, reopening in 1921 before closing permanently in 1949.<sup>121</sup>

A Catholic school was established on Kororoit Creek in 1862: a small, wooden building with

OPPOSITE

**William Luby, Catherine Luby and their mother Mary Luby (née Dowling) outside their house on Reserve Road, Melton, c. 1880s.**

**Ann Dowling and two of her sons outside the Myers family home on Ballarat Road, Melton, c. 1880s.**

Edna (Myers) Barrie collection

1850-1900





a shingled roof. The school started out with an enrolment of 35 children, but steady decline led to its closure in 1875. The school building was destroyed by a fire a few years later.<sup>122</sup> After two years of petitioning, the residents at Djerriwarrh finally got a local school for their children, who previously had to travel to Melton for an education. School No. 1635 opened in 1867. A new wooden building with room for up to 60 students was built in 1875 and the school continued to educate children in Djerriwarrh up until 1925.<sup>123</sup>

Some of the early schools lasted only a few years. A school at Mount Atkinson was open less than a decade and Keilor Road Station School survived less than five years.<sup>124</sup> Established in 1868, the New Cambridge Common School educated local children for three decades before being renamed Rockbank School in 1906. One local resident described their memories of the school:

The old school was built of stone carted by the local people. It was called 'New Cambridge' Number 919 ... There were a lot of houses about then and large families, and that was the only school near them.<sup>125</sup>

More successful again, were Yangardook School No. 946, Melton School No. 430 and Diggers Rest School No. 2479. Yangardook School, later renamed Toolern Vale, was opened in 1869, after parents sent letters to the Board of Education requesting a local school for the 81 children in the area.<sup>126</sup> In 1969 the school celebrated its centenary. Melton Common School started life in the Combined Protestant Church building during the week, and was granted its school number in 1863. In 1870, a purpose-built, bluestone schoolhouse was constructed on what is now Unitt Street. The building was extended in 1877.<sup>127</sup> Today, after more than 155 years, Melton Primary School remains one of a growing number of schools in the City of Melton.

Diggers Rest School No. 2479 was created in 1882 through an amalgamation of Diggers Rest School No. 1447 with Kororoit School No. 1933, when it became clear that there were not enough enrolments to sustain both schools. At first, this new school used the Kororoit School building, but in 1888 it was relocated to the site of Diggers Rest railway station, where it remained for the next century.<sup>128</sup>

The opening of the Melton to Melbourne railway in 1884 provided a big boost to the local timber industry which could more easily transport firewood to Melbourne. However, the location of the new station in Melton South caused controversy in the local community.<sup>129</sup> As early as

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM  
TOP LEFT

**The Monmouthshire Hotel in Diggers Rest before being demolished in 1961. Built in 1844, the hotel hosted the first Melton Shire Council meeting in 1871.**

J.T. Collins Collection. State Library Victoria, H95.200/238

**Toolern Vale State School No. 946, photographed by Ada McCorkell.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 1233

**The Lord Raglan Hotel was built in 1855 as a stopping point on the road to the goldfields.**

Edna (Myers) Barrie collection

**The Melton Court House was constructed in 1892 and operated for close to 100 years before being converted into the visitor centre and cafe it is today.**

J.T. Collins Collection. State Library Victoria, H98.250/170

**Dunvegan was built on Smith Street in 1875 as the town's first police station. It served a variety of purposes, including the Mechanics' Institute library and Civil Defence headquarters. In 1977 it was demolished and rebuilt as part of The Willows Historical Park.**

J.T. Collins Collection. State Library Victoria, H98.250/176



**Harold Werribee Staughton, son of prominent early squatter Simon Staughton, was Shire President at the time of the railway opening in 1884.**

Melton & District Historical Society

**Students and teachers outside Melton State School No. 430 in 1870. This was the first year that the school operated from its new bluestone building on Unitt Street.**

Margaret Robinson (née McCoy) collection



1881 a meeting was held at the Royal Hotel for the purpose of getting the proposed 'railway brought nearer to the township of Melton'.<sup>130</sup> Alexander Blackwood spoke of:

... the great benefit it would be to the inhabitants of Melton and its vicinity to have the railway as near to the township as possible, and the loss it would be to them if taken to a distance from it.<sup>131</sup>

A year later, at another meeting, Harold Werribee Staughton exclaimed at the 'ill effect of the station not being placed as near Melton as possible', arguing it would 'ruin the whole of the business people and labouring men of Melton'.<sup>132</sup> Despite the local opposition, the railway station remained at Melton South and was officially opened 'amid many manifestations of public rejoicing' on 2 April 1884.<sup>133</sup> Among the dignitaries present for the opening of the new railway was politician Alfred Deakin, who said in a speech given afterwards at the Shire Hall that he had 'great faith in the future of Melton' and believed 'now the railway had been extended to the





**Workmen engaged in the construction of the Melton railway viaduct over the Werribee River, c. 1884. Campsites for the workers were set up nearby.**

Photographer Charles Rudd. State Library Victoria, H99.182/1, H99.182/2

district, it would be far more prosperous five years hence than it is today'.<sup>134</sup> By the time of the opening, Shire President Harold Werribee Staughton acknowledged the benefits the railway would provide to the Melton community, remarking that he had 'not the slightest doubt that increased prosperity would follow the opening of the railway'.<sup>135</sup> The station building, designed in the Victorian 'Kaniva' style, was constructed in the town of Leeor and moved to Melton South in 1898.<sup>136</sup>

The railway did not signal 'increased prosperity' for the local Aboriginal people; instead, much the opposite. The last camp in the Melton township was observed on the south side of Ballarat Road about '40 chains east from the Keilor Road junction'.<sup>137</sup> Local historian John Pollitt noted 'the natives finally disappeared from the district shortly after the opening of the Railway Station in 1884'.<sup>138</sup>

1850-1900

# The Mechanics

Before the instantaneous communication offered by computers and the internet, before even the advent of telephones and cars, community spaces like town halls were crucial for communication and social connection. Gathering places were particularly important to community life in rural towns, where many people lived in isolated areas. The churches and schools in the Melton district were essential gathering points, as were community halls.

Mechanics' institutes, established throughout Britain and its colonies in the nineteenth century, were the forerunners to public libraries. Nearly every town in Victoria established a mechanics' institute, which often encompassed a hall, library and reading room. The facilities were used both for educational purposes, and for entertainment and social activities.<sup>139</sup>

The Melton Mechanics' Institute hall, known by many as 'The Mechanics', was at the heart of life in the district, both literally in its central location on Melton's High Street, and in terms of its vital role in local social life.<sup>140</sup> The multitude of events held at the hall over the years provided welcome social connection for those in the community who lived and worked in remote locations of the shire and beyond. It provided a hub of learning and education, culture, entertainment, commemoration and celebration for generations of community members.

Melton Mechanics' Institute's first committee was formed in 1866. To raise funds for the institute, a concert was held in the local Agricultural Society shed, which was 'lit with kerosene lamps, a stage was rigged up and the shed closed in with tarpaulins'.<sup>141</sup> Further fundraising events were held at the Golden Fleece Hotel, before a reading room started in a bluestone cottage at the rear of the hotel.<sup>142</sup> The institute officially opened in the Agricultural Society's shed in December 1868. This building was later moved to High Street and became the basis of a timber and iron hall.<sup>143</sup>

By 1873, the building was dilapidated, and the search began to find a new home for the institute. The Shire Hall was used for meetings and a library until another local hall known as the Royal Hall was purchased in 1898. This hall faced Church Street but was moved to High Street and situated well back from the road to allow space for the addition of a new front to the building.

Much bickering ensued amongst the committee of the Mechanics' Institute, over plans and finances for additions to the building. Finally, a brick extension consisting of several new rooms was erected at the front of the building in 1910. While most other Mechanics' Institute buildings in Victoria were simple weatherboard, Melton's new brick building was architecturally designed and of a substantial size. The building was further enlarged and altered in 1925, with each addition followed by a grand opening ball and concert.<sup>144</sup>

The hall hosted countless events, from small meetings of community groups, to major balls and concerts that saw crowds spill into the street. The hall was used for church services and school classrooms in 1869. Events over the years include debutante balls, card parties, dancing and singing classes, kitchen teas, wedding receptions, birthday parties, and carnivals. Several 'Back to Melton' events were held in the 1920s to encourage community members who had moved away to return to Melton and reconnect with old friends.<sup>145</sup> Mary Collins remembered watching films in the hall in the 1920s:



**Melton Mechanics' Institute in 1912, with its new brick front, which was added in 1910. The institute acted as an important central gathering point for the community from when it was first established in a shed in the 1860s.**

Melton & District Historical Society





**Children dressed in costume outside the Melton Mechanics' Institute, date unknown. The building has seen countless parties, balls, concerts and theatre performances over its more than 100 years.**

Donated by Edna Barrie, Melton & District Historical Society, 884

Silent pictures were held in the Mechanics Hall on Saturday nights, run by a petrol engine which frequently broke down and Mr. Hector Lloyd would get it going again. The Hall in darkness, Miss Ross played the piano by candlelight while the pictures were on. She got 7/6 (75¢) for three hours playing. Those were the days – everybody happy and friendly.<sup>146</sup>

While most community groups in the district used the hall at some point, it was particularly associated with the Melton Masonic Lodge, Country Women's Association and Red Cross.<sup>147</sup> It was used as a medical clinic, and for shelter and community support during bushfires. Mabel Rogers had fond memories of the abundant suppers and delicious coffee 'brewed in the old coppers'.<sup>148</sup> Several musical and theatrical groups were associated with the hall, including the Melton Social Club (started in 1907), the Minstrels (1921), the Jovial Entertainers (1926), Social and Dramatic Club (1936) and the Melton Amateurs (1950). These groups raised money for the Mechanics' Institute and other local organisations, as well as providing popular entertainment for the community for many years.

The building was owned, maintained and financed by the community for much of its history, and countless working bees were held to maintain and look after it. Sadly, a leaking roof saw many of the books in the Mechanics' Institute's library destroyed in 1957. Only a few were saved from the rubbish tip when the library was cleared out in 1966.<sup>149</sup>

Over time, as local councils increasingly provided community spaces and facilities, mechanics' institutes gradually declined.<sup>150</sup> Ownership was transferred to the Shire Council in 1982 and the final meeting of the Melton Mechanics' Institute was held on 16 March 1984.<sup>151</sup> The building still stands on Melton's High Street, behind the World War I memorial at the entrance to the town. It and the old court house are the only two remaining early public buildings on Melton's High Street; prominent landmarks of Melton's past.

### Work, rest and play

The census for 1871, the same year that Melton was declared a shire, recorded a population total of 1,243 people. The shire had 231 dwellings with an average of 5.62 people per dwelling. There were no Aboriginal people recorded as living in the shire at this time.<sup>152</sup> The same census stated that the data collectors had counted 1,330 Aboriginal people in Victoria – only slightly higher than the entire population of the new Shire of Melton.<sup>153</sup> Historic census data is particularly unreliable for figures relating to First Nations people. This is for a number of reasons, but primarily that they were often deliberately excluded from the census. By the 1860s, most First Nations people in Victoria were living on reserves and missions. Those residing on reserves and missions were included in the census up until 1901. After federation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were excluded from all census data for the next seventy years, after the constitution of 1901 deliberately excluded them from legislation. It was not until the 1971 census that Australian Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders were once again included in Australian population statistics.<sup>154</sup> As the Shire of Melton grew and began to be defined by its agricultural surroundings, it was those very characteristics that proved completely incompatible with traditional ways of life for the Aboriginal people of the Kulin Nation.

Sport has always been a popular pastime in the district. The Pyke brothers have been attributed with introducing hunting to the area, with Thomas Henry Pyke importing foxes from England for sport in 1845.<sup>155</sup> Nicknamed 'Gentleman', perhaps for the 'considerable style' he maintained, Pyke's hounds were reportedly 'famed above all in the colony'.<sup>156</sup> The hunts initially started out pursuing dingoes and kangaroos, 'although emu, for short speedy runs' were also appreciated, before the importation of foxes and deer.<sup>157</sup> In the early years of the area's development, Pyke's Hunt was a popular fixture on the Victorian social calendar. It was disbanded in 1854, the same year the Melbourne Hunt Club was established.<sup>158</sup>

As well as hunting, Melton and the surrounding districts played a prominent role in the development of greyhound coursing and racing in Australia. Coursing involves hunting with greyhounds, who chase after their prey by sight rather than by scent. The first officially recognised public coursing meeting to take place in Australia was held in 1873 at Rupertswood, the Sunbury property of Sir William Clarke.<sup>159</sup> The following year, the inaugural St Leger Stakes took place in Diggers Rest, where the hares were described as 'plentiful, large framed and stout runners'.<sup>160</sup> In 1876, the inaugural meeting of the Melton Coursing Club took place in Staughton's paddock. The

Hunting was a popular pastime in Melton in the nineteenth century. Thomas Henry Pyke was said to have imported foxes from England for sport in 1845. Pyke's Hunt was a popular fixture on the social calendar but was disbanded in 1854, the same year the Melbourne Hunt Club was established. This image published in the *Illustrated Australian News* in 1895 shows members of the Melbourne Hunt Club and their hounds.

David Syme & Co. State Library Victoria,  
IAN01/07/95/12



newspaper reported that the paddock 'swarmed with hares' and 'Melton promises to be in the future one of the country clubs that are likely to last'.<sup>161</sup> Indeed, Diggers Rest was host to some of Australia's leading greyhound racing events.<sup>162</sup> Greyhound coursing remained a popular pursuit well into the twentieth century.

Plumpton racing – named after a village in England – was a version of coursing that involved the construction of an enclosed oval, rather than greyhounds running in open fields.<sup>163</sup> The Victorian Coursing Club (VCC), with Sir William Clarke as president, constructed the first plumpton enclosure in Australia at Diggers Rest in 1882.<sup>164</sup> Such was the superiority of the VCC plumpton enclosure that it was said by prominent coursing and plumpton supporter, the Hon. Henry Gore MLC, that not even 'the most renowned coursing grounds in England equalled the new set-up at Diggers Rest'.<sup>165</sup> By the 1890s, greyhound racing was growing in popularity and plumpton coursing was declining. By 1894, the Victorian Coursing Club closed the site at Diggers Rest.<sup>166</sup> Today, the ruined remains of one of Clarke's plumpton hare enclosures still exists and is recognised by the City of Melton as a site of local significance.<sup>167</sup>

Horse racing was another popular event in the district of Melton, and remains almost synonymous with the area today. The first racecourse was established fairly informally around





**This photograph shows an event for plumpton coursing (hunting with greyhounds in an enclosed area) in Diggers Rest, where the first plumpton enclosure in Australia was constructed in 1882.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 673

the mid-1850s.<sup>168</sup> By 1874, a public meeting was held, where it was decided to establish a Melton Racing Club with a subscription of £1 per membership. William Cross Yuille, who took up settlement in Rockbank in the 1850s, became a prominent figure in the Victorian racing industry. Yuille was the first importer of stud racehorses to the area and went on to become a famed racing writer for the *Australasian* newspaper.<sup>169</sup> Yuille may have been the first breeder of racehorses in the area but he was far from last. Melton's horseracing legacy was only just beginning.

The Melton Cricket Club (MCC) formed in the late 1860s. Early matches were not in Melton's favour, with one performance against Bacchus Marsh in 1869 so poor that the newspaper reported that the defeat sustained by Melton could only hope to 'stimulate them to practice regularly'.<sup>170</sup> A year later, however, the team was still struggling; a sound defeat by Sunbury attributed to 'Melton cricketers being so much scattered as not to be able to meet for practice'.<sup>171</sup>

The Melton Football Club was not far behind, forming officially in 1880. Simon Staughton was elected president and George Payne captain, with a committee and an annual subscription

**As well as the community's sporting clubs, sport was a popular activity among the district's school children, like this cricket team at Melton State School in 1921.**

Melton & District Historical Society



starting at two shillings and six pence.<sup>172</sup> Much like the cricket team, the Melton Football Club was outmatched during some of its early games. Defeated by Bacchus Marsh in August 1880, the local newspaper reported the loss was due in part to Melton not having a full team, while 'the game was considered ... a very rough one, owing to the greenness of the majority of the players'.<sup>173</sup> Although it is yet to be proven, local legend tells that the Collingwood Football Club travelled to Diggers Rest for a game during the 1890s, and were sent packing back to Melbourne.<sup>174</sup>

Shooting, much like hunting, was also a popular pastime in the area, with gun clubs also being established towards the end of the nineteenth century. Melton went on to produce some world-class shooting champions in the early twentieth century, including Donald Mackintosh.<sup>175</sup>



**Melton football team outside Mac's Hotel (formerly the Minns' Hotel) in Melton's High Street, 1918. The club lost many of its players to the call of duty during World War I.**

Library Collection, Melton City Council

**BELOW**  
**Shooting champion Donald MacKintosh, c. 1908.**

Talma & Co. State Library Victoria, H96.75/2

### An expert shot

Donald Mackintosh was born in Rockbank on 21 September 1866. He quickly proved himself as an expert shot, joining the Bacchus Marsh Shooting Club at the age of ten and the Melbourne Gun Club at 23. In 1890 he won the Melbourne Gun Club £1000 Cup Handicap.<sup>176</sup>

Donald represented Australia at the 1900 Paris Olympic Games. However, due to confusion at the time over whether this competition was an official Olympic event, Donald was not recognised as an Olympic medallist during his lifetime. In 1987 the IOC issued Donald's gold and bronze medals. Donald continued to travel around Europe and won many other competitions, including the London Gun Club Challenge Cup three times in a row and the Grand Prix at Monte Carlo twice. As well as being an expert shot, Donald was also well educated and wrote poetry. Most astonishingly, he was also completely blind in his left eye.<sup>177</sup>





**BELOW**

**Life in the Melton district in the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, revolved around agricultural activities. Horses pulling carts laden with hay and other produce was a familiar sight.**

Melton & District Historical Society

**RIGHT**

**A horse-powered threshing machine at work.**

Photographer S.W. Hodkinson. State Library Victoria, H33574

Some of the biggest recreational events during the mid to late nineteenth century, however, were those put on by the Melton Agricultural Society. The anonymous writer 'Candid' described Melton in the 1850s as:

... the nucleus of a village likely to rise into an important township. A considerable quality of land has recently been disposed of, and is fast becoming devoted to purposes of cultivation. Within a circuit of a few miles there are upwards of forty farmers, busily engaged in fencing, tilling etc.<sup>178</sup>

Agricultural life quickly became the central focus around which activities in the district revolved. Harvest time involved everyone, affecting school attendance and other local activities.<sup>179</sup> The Melton Agricultural Society was one of the earliest established in Victoria, forming on 24 July 1858.<sup>180</sup> Its inaugural event was a ploughing match of horse and bullock teams designed to



showcase the ploughing prowess of the farmers in the district. The event had a 'large attendance of visitors on the field' with fourteen competitors battling it out. After the awards were distributed, attendees adjourned to the Brighton Hotel, where close to 45 gentlemen 'sat down to a most excellent dinner'.<sup>181</sup> The Agricultural Society offered prizes for a range of different categories, including cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry, dairy produce, vegetables, and of course, horses.<sup>182</sup> The winner of the 'horse stock' category received the largest prize.<sup>183</sup> The society was located on the north-east corner of Smith and Unitt streets and its premises later became the Melton Mechanics' Institute, which was formed in 1866.<sup>184</sup>

As well as 'horse stock', the area was developing a reputation for superior crops. The agricultural crown jewel was Yangardook (Green Hills, later Toolern Vale). By the early 1860s, Yangardook had the highest yield of barley in the Western Bourke district – a division which included Melton, Wyndham, Bacchus Marsh, Blackwood, Sunbury, Gisborne and Lancefield. Agricultural inspector James Scott reported that 'the farmers in this parish display great judgement and anxiety in endeavouring to excel each other in growing cereals'.<sup>185</sup> The Melton district in general had 'acquired a prestige for the growth of superior wheat, barley' and other cereals; a reputation that was further enhanced by the fact that four local farmers had won first-class medals for wheat at the London Exhibition of 1862.<sup>186</sup>

Seasonal and temporary workers were crucial to the local agricultural industry, assisting farmers with building fences and dry stone walls, and the harvest-time work of reaping, stooking and threshing. The 1860s saw the introduction of the first agricultural machinery. James Martin's threshing machine was the first in the shire, though sadly 'a spark from the engine set fire to the straw', just as he was finishing driving it between the stacks, and only the engine was saved from the flames.<sup>187</sup> Daily life on the land was not easy for Melton's early settlers. Looking back on that period in 1905, Robert Lidgett observed that they 'suffered many hardships and privations', yet they displayed 'resourcefulness and grit and endurance' – features that came to characterise the fledgling community as it grew.<sup>188</sup>

By the mid-1870s, the Melton Agricultural Society was in decline, but agricultural life in Melton was only just beginning to pick up pace. Horses and hay would become central players in the story of the district in years to come. The peak of the hay and chaff industry coincided with the further division of large pastoralist estates in the early years of the twentieth century. Melton's agricultural peak was still to come.



**Ralph Parkinson JP served two terms as President of the Shire of Melton. He was a pioneering farmer who introduced steam traction engines and threshing machines into the district.**

Melton & District Historical Society

1850-1900



D A L O U S I E

TALBOT

ANGLESEA

EVELYN

M 5430  
County of  
**BOURKE**

Scale 2 Miles to an Inch

*HW 9/17/7*

REFERENCE	
Boundaries of Municipalities	.....
Boundaries of Municipalities within Municipalities	.....
State Forests	.....
Chase Settlement Estates	.....
Parishes	.....
County	.....
Main Roads	.....
Railways	.....



MORNINGTON



## CHAPTER 4

# Transformations

1900–1940



*... the township of Melton ... is hemmed in on all sides by large estates, and has never made any progress. Since the recent subdivision of land in the district, however, signs of an awakening are beginning to be noticeable ...*

*When a general system of subdivision of this land sets in Melton will become a prosperous agricultural centre.<sup>1</sup>*

*Weekly Times, 1906*

**1 THE LAND**  
Dreamtime to 1835

**2 DIVERGENT STORIES**  
1835 to 1850

**3 A COMMUNITY EMERGES**  
1850 to 1900  
Population in 1865: 1,000

**4 TRANSFORMATIONS**  
1900 to 1940  
Population in 1919: 1,700

**5 OPEN FOR PROGRESS**  
1940 to 1980  
Population in 1973: 9,500

**6 A CITY FOR THE FUTURE**  
1980 to 2018  
Population in 2016: 135,443

1900–1940

#### PREVIOUS PAGES

##### **Map from 1919 of the County of Bourke showing the Exford and Overnewton Estates, and the railway line through Rockbank and Melton South.**

Compiled by F.S. Hilcke, Melbourne, Department of Lands and Survey, State Library Victoria

##### **Workers at Dixon's Chaff Mill in Melton South, c. 1910.**

Melton & District Historical Society

#### OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

##### **Plan of the subdivision of the Overnewton Estate, 1904.**

Haughton Collection, State Library Victoria

##### **Map of the Parish of Djerriwarrh, 1928.**

Department of Lands and Survey, Melbourne. State Library Victoria

##### **Advertisement for the Exford Estate, c. 1906.**

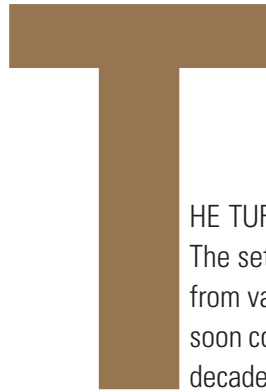
State Library Victoria

##### **Plan of the Exford Estate, c. 1906.**

State Library Victoria

##### **Plan of the Overnewton Estate, 1912.**

Department of Lands and Survey, Melbourne. State Library Victoria



THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY ushered in a major new era in the history of Melton. The settlement schemes of the early twentieth century saw the district completely transformed from vast tracts of pastoral and grazing land to numerous small farms. The Shire of Melton was soon consumed by increasingly rapid growth and development, which would come to define it in decades to come. With many more people moving to the district, the smaller nuclear communities, such as Toolern Vale and Rockbank, expanded and consolidated their places on the map. New roads and infrastructure were built. Economic and social life in the shire was transformed. Schools, businesses and community buildings were established. The community also faced significant hardship, supporting each other through war, economic depression, fire and drought. It was a period of change, struggle, progress and immense transformation, as the shire came of age.

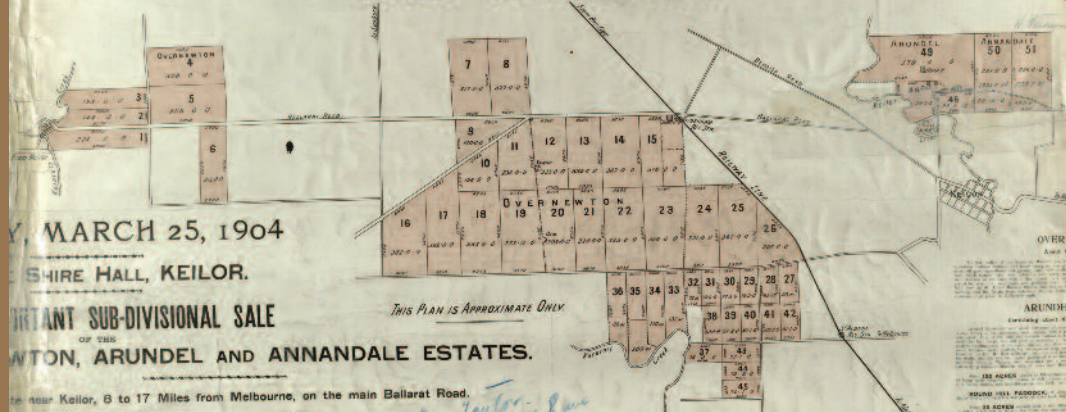
### **Closer settlement**

When land in the western district was first opened up for selection in the 1860s, it was anticipated by many that small farmers would get a chance to establish themselves. However, much of the land was acquired by established pastoralists who simply added to their large existing land holdings, resulting in few small farms being established. Those who did set up small farms in the Melton district faced a serious lack of water and access to roads. In the Mount Cottrell area, twenty-three miles of closed roads, mostly on Clarke's estate, severely restricted travel in all directions for the small, isolated farming community there. Many were forced to give up and move elsewhere. The number of small farmers in the Parish of Pywheitjorrk (in which Mount Cottrell was located) declined from 14 in 1871 to just 5 in 1891.<sup>2</sup>

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the government sought to encourage the

MAUSHER VOL. I 3000/1076-7046 10/16-17

# Subdivisional Plan of the OVERNEWTON, ARUNDEL & ANNANDALE ESTATES NEAR MELBOURNE.

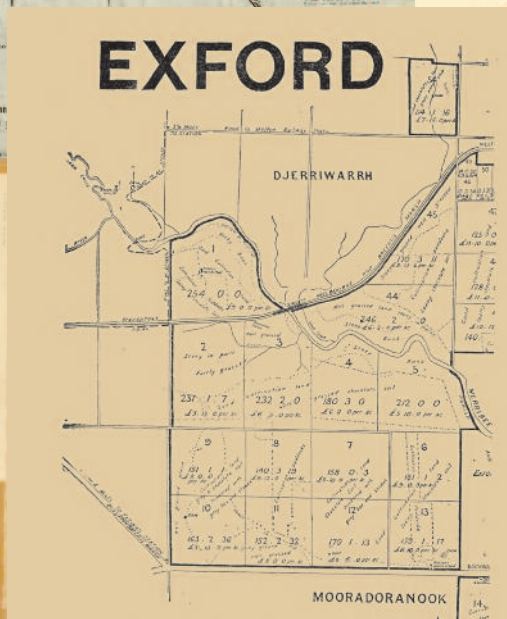
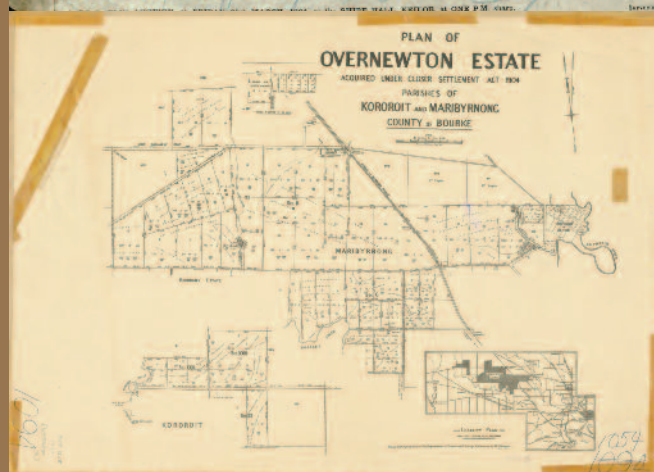


MARCH 25, 1904  
SHIRE HALL, KEILOR.

IMPORTANT SUB-DIVISIONAL SALE  
OF THE  
OVERNEWTON, ARUNDEL AND ANNANDALE ESTATES.

near Keilor, 8 to 17 Miles from Melbourne, on the main Ballarat Road.  
By Order of the Executor of the Estate of the late WILLIAM TAYLOR.

Edward Trenchard & Co.,  
ASSOCIATED WITH  
Ward & Co. AND Pearson, Rowe, Smith & Co.



VICTORIA.  
SUBDIVISION  
OF THE  
**Exford Estate.**  
LAND FOR ENGLISH EMIGRANTS.

Under the *Closer Settlement Act 1904*, the Victorian Government has provided for the purchase of large privately-owned estates, which are only utilized as grazing areas, and for their subdivision into farm allotments, including an area of land not exceeding £1,500 in value, and allotments for agricultural labourers, including land up to £200 in value.

The Lands Purchase and Management Board, which has been appointed to administer the *Closer Settlement Act*, has power to advance to agricultural labourers a sum of £50 or the £1 for £1 principle; thus, if a lessee erects a building worth £100, the board will lend him £50 to help pay for it.

For emigrants intending to settle in Victoria, special provisions have been made. Their applications will be dealt with, and the land allotted to them before leaving England; the only expenses they will have to meet will be their fares to Victoria and providing their own personal effects required on the voyage. On arrival in Melbourne, they will be met at the boat and advised with regard to obtaining temporary accommodation in the city, &c., and afterwards conveyed free by rail to their holdings. An applicant, when making his application, should state whether he will require a home erected for him by the Government in anticipation of his arrival. Friends or relatives may take advantage of the group system, and, while holding separate allotments, assist one another by the reciprocal use of plant and stock. To enable settlers to make the utmost use of their capital, instalments on their land



establishment of smaller farms or more 'closely settled' agricultural communities. This was partly a reaction to the economic depression of the 1890s, and was seen as a way of helping working men to establish themselves on the land. It was also a means of boosting Victoria's agricultural industry, as so much fertile land that could be used for farming and housing was locked up in large pastoral estates and not being used to its full potential.<sup>3</sup>

Some held strong opinions about this situation, such as radical liberal politician John Quick, who wrote in 1883: 'What a monstrous and barbaric law that must be, under which ... splendid land ... capable of giving existence to a teeming population, is locked up in pastoral solitudes'.<sup>4</sup> Some large pastoral landholders, including the Staughtons and Clarkes, had already been leasing part of their estates to small farmers and graziers under what was known as a share system. Sir Rupert Turner Havelock Clarke acknowledged the pressure to make some of his Rockbank estate available, and increasingly did so through both sale and lease following the death of his father, William John Turner Clarke, in 1897.<sup>5</sup>

But the change was ultimately driven by state legislation. The Land Act 1898 saw the establishment of a 'closer settlement' branch of the Lands Department in Victoria. However, it was not until the Closer Settlement Act 1904 that the scheme created obvious change. The 1904 Act enabled the Closer Settlement Board to compulsorily acquire land for subdivision and increased the amount of money that it could spend doing so. It allowed the board to buy and subdivide pastoral estates and sell them to small farmers. Large pastoral land holdings were broken up across Victoria, leading to significant growth in the number of rural properties in the state. This work was continued in the post-World War I period with the Soldier Settlement Acts. The number of rural properties in Victoria increased from 42,000 in 1901 to 80,500 by 1923.<sup>6</sup>

The Closer Settlement Board purchased several large estates in the Melton district, which were subdivided into smaller lots and then sold. This included Harold Werribee Staughton's Exford and Staughton Vale estates and Sir Rupert Clarke's Rockbank estate.<sup>7</sup> William Taylor's Overnewton estate of more than 11,300 acres, part of which was in the Shire of Melton, was one of the first and largest estates to be purchased under the scheme, in May 1905. It was divided into 53 farms, which were advertised as offering 'good agricultural and grazing land', with 'good roads'. Thirty-two of Staughton's Exford Estate's 52 lots were sold at an auction held at the Melton Mechanics' Institute a few months later. These sales were major events, attracting large crowds and keen competition.<sup>8</sup>

### An agricultural centre

The closer settlement movement was a significant turning point for the district, with thousands of acres of old pastoral empires divided and sold. Vast sheep runs were transformed into small dairy and hay farms, although many of the smallholdings created during this period developed as mixed farms, which involved a combination of crop, stock and sheep farming. Crops included wheat, oats, hay and barley. With the advent of refrigeration in the late nineteenth century enabling the export of dairy and meat products, these areas of production saw particular expansion.<sup>9</sup> As farming and pastoralism expanded, sale yards and stock yards were built in Melton and Melton South, and many locals – including the Beattie, Cockbill, Tarleton, Watson, Campbell and Minns families – became prominent players in the Melbourne meat market.<sup>10</sup>

The revolution in the dairy industry that had begun as a result of technological advancement in the later years of the nineteenth century continued apace in Melton with the boost of the Closer Settlement Acts. In 1904 there were 85 dairy farms in the district, most of which had between five and twenty cows.<sup>11</sup> The following year, a local newspaper commented on the increasing



**Workmen on the Barrie property, c. 1920s. The Barrie family were prominent in the district's booming chaff industry in the early twentieth century.**

Melton & District Historical Society







numbers of 'dairymen' in the district and reported 'Great quantities of milk are leaving our railway station daily'.<sup>12</sup> In 1910, dairying was for the first time listed in the *Bacchus Marsh Express* as one of Melton's leading industries, together with farming and grazing.<sup>13</sup>

While the meat and dairy industries saw significant expansion, the hay and chaff industry boomed. Hay had always been an important product in the Melton district, but became even more so. As it was used to feed horses, hay was a crucial mainstay of life and industry in the early twentieth century. The soil and climate in western Victoria is particularly suited to growing hay, but during this period Melton hay became known as the best in the country. Due to the area's low rainfall and long, hot and dry summers, the hay grew and ripened slowly. It produced a very hard stem that could be cut cleanly with a well sharpened knife.<sup>14</sup> By 1911, nearly half of all cultivated land in the western region of Victoria was growing hay, and most of this was in the shires of Melton and Werribee, with haystacks and stooks of straw dotting the countryside.<sup>15</sup>

The Barrie family established their chaff mill in Melton South in 1902, followed by another in Rockbank in 1908, with the mill's machinery brought from Melton by horse and dray.<sup>16</sup> Bon Barrie grew up in a small weatherboard house adjacent to the mill in Station Road, Melton South. He later described:

The rumble of horse-drawn wagons along the unsealed road serving the nearby chaff mills and the railway station, was occasionally drowned out by the regular pumping of a steam engine providing power for the chaff cutters.<sup>17</sup>

Dixon's Mill was also established in Melton during this period, and Austral Grain and Produce opened a mill north of Melton at Diggers Rest in 1912. Another chaff mill established in Diggers Rest in 1925 operated for around 15 years. The chaff mills were located strategically near train stations to allow ease of transport, with the Rockbank and Melton mills on the Ballarat line, and the Diggers Rest chaff mill established near the Bendigo railway line.<sup>18</sup>

The railway stations were a hive of activity, transporting produce from the Shire of Melton to Melbourne. '...every day we see hay and chaff being carted to the station in large quantities', the *Bacchus Marsh Express* observed, 'and the amount trucked away each day ... is considerable'.<sup>19</sup> Local dairyman Bill Cahill later recalled when the Dixon Brothers and Ward's mills produced up to 1,800 tons of chaff a month, and employed twenty men each:

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

**Railway stations were a hive of activity during the 1900s, transporting produce such as meat, dairy, hay and chaff from the Melton district to Melbourne. Rockbank station served the nearby chaff mill.**

Melton & District Historical Society

**Workers at Harry Coburn's shearing depot at the rear of the Monmouthshire Hotel, Diggers Rest, c. 1925. The old hotel had been de-licensed by that stage, and was used for the accommodation of shearers.**

Edna (Myers) Barrie collection

**Exford State School students.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 1282

**Exford primary school teacher Daisy Erland and students with a snake that had been shot.**

Melton & District Historical Society

**Working horses like these were an integral part of life in the district, relied on for transport and agricultural labour.**

Library Collection, Melton City Council



**Students from Mount Cotterell State School, 1940 (top) and Toolern Vale School, 1924.**

Werribee & District Historical Society, ID428  
Melton & District Historical Society

**OPPOSITE**

**The Barrie family's travelling chaff cutter.**

EE and EW Barrie family collection

Wagons and drays began to line up at 2 a.m. to offload hay which left Melton as chaff for local and export markets. Machinery was run by steam, using timber brought down in cart loads of six-seven tons from Breakneck, and illumination for the night shift was provided by hurricane lanterns.<sup>20</sup>

It was an exciting time for locals, as they saw farming and agriculture flourish and welcomed newcomers to the district. As the number of farms in the shire increased, so too did the population. The Melton Shire's fertile plains and proximity to Melbourne made it an attractive prospect for farmers. The nearby railway line meant that it was affordable and quick to transport produce. Many small, double-fronted weatherboard farmhouses were built, some of which survive today, a testament to the historic changes of over one hundred years ago.<sup>21</sup>

Employment opportunities brought farm labourers to the district, with the numbers of these workers increasing by 35 per cent between 1906 and 1911. They often lived on farms in sheds or small cottages and earned meagre wages, which could easily be lost on an evening at the local hotels.<sup>22</sup> In 1903 there were around 300 residents in the Melton township, and 1,316 in the Melton Shire as a whole.<sup>23</sup> By 1911, there were around 1,600 residents in the shire, representing a 60 per cent increase in the population since 1890.<sup>24</sup> Through local groups such as the Melton Progress and Better Farming Association and Melton Young Farmers' Club, the community supported each other and shared innovations in agricultural practices.<sup>25</sup>

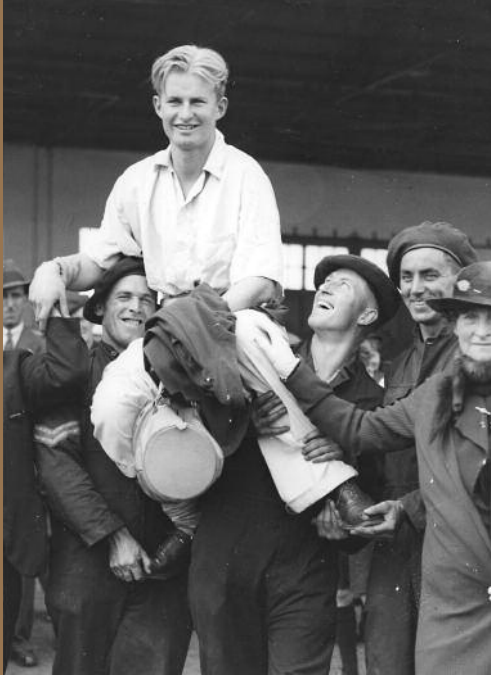
As villages and communities developed, the Closer Settlement Board also contributed to the cost of building new infrastructure, from roads and bridges to dams and irrigation channels.<sup>26</sup> The Bridge Road concrete bridge in Melton South, built in 1913, provided crucial access to the railway station for farmers on the Exford Estate.<sup>27</sup> Schools opened in Exford (1902), Melton Railway Station (1911), Sydenham West (1914), Mount Cotterell (1921), and Melton Park (1928), while the Melton State School was renovated and enlarged in 1908.<sup>28</sup> Diggers Rest was included in the Victorian Municipal Directory as a separate township for the first time in 1910. By that time, it had a railway station and three hotels, and by 1915, Diggers Rest had also acquired a chaff mill and weighbridge, followed by the establishment of a Mechanics' Institute in 1922.<sup>29</sup> Far from being 'hemmed in' by pastoral estates, Melton Shire by the 1920s was a bustling hive of development and activity.



1900-1940



# Tales of aviation



**Aviator Jimmy Melrose.**

State Library Victoria, H6365

Victoria's western plains took a leading role in the development of Australia's aviation industry in the early twentieth century, with the construction of numerous airfields, airports and the headquarters of major aviation companies. The Shire of Melton, and Diggers Rest in particular, lays claim to one of the most famous and celebrated moments in aviation history.

It was there that American magician and escape artist Harry Houdini took to the skies on 18 March 1910, in what is generally considered to be the first controlled, powered aircraft flight in Australia. Houdini made three successful flights over paddocks owned by local farmer Mr Cook, reaching an altitude of 30 metres and lasting between one minute and three and a half minutes in the air. *The Argus* newspaper reported:

Houdini swept boldly away from the flying field, confident of his control of the plane, and passing over rocky rises and stone fences, described a great circle, which was ... well over two miles.<sup>30</sup>

Met with cheers from the excited crowd of spectators, Houdini was reported to have remarked afterwards:

I have fulfilled my greatest ambitions. I shall never forget my sublime and enthralling sensations, and I only hope that my success will encourage other aviators to persevere and conquer the air.<sup>31</sup>

This was not the only major aviation incident to take place in the shire, but sadly not all ended so successfully. On 5 July 1936, locals in Melton South saw a plane emerge from behind clouds above the railway station, in heavy wind and rain. Engine roaring, the plane went into a spin and disintegrated into pieces in mid-air, before crashing to the ground near Arnold's Creek. The pilot, young Australian aviator Jimmy Melrose, and a passenger, Alexander Campbell, were killed.

Jimmy Melrose was a popular figure in international aviation, having been the youngest and only solo pilot to finish the London to Melbourne Centenary Air Race in 1934. His death, at the age of just twenty-two, caused an outpouring of sorrow. He was honoured with a state funeral two days later at St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne, which was attended by thousands of people.<sup>32</sup>

Locals Maisie Arthur, Ted Wickham and Bill Cahill gave eyewitness accounts of the accident to the authorities, and an inquest found that it was the result of structural failure and poor weather. A cairn erected by locals near the scene was reconstructed by the Melton and District Historical Society in Brookfield, opposite the Melrose Memorial Reserve, on the 40th anniversary of the crash in 1976.<sup>33</sup>

**Harry Houdini's biplane at  
Diggers Rest, 1910.**

W.G. Alma conjuring collection. State  
Library Victoria, P8/NO.28





**Melton Mechanics' Institute.**  
The building dates from 1910  
and still stands today.

Photographer John T. Collins. State Library  
Victoria, H98.250/169

**Melton's premiership tennis  
team, 1927.**

Melton & District Historical Society

**OPPOSITE**

**A local theatre company  
performance in Melton, 1920.**  
Some of the names  
mentioned on the back of the  
photograph are: Allie  
Trethowan, Lucy Hardy, Millie  
Trethowan, Lily Trethowan,  
Stan Hardy, Jack McGuire  
and Edith Kinnersley.

Library Collection, Melton City Council

**A memo book detailing funds  
raised for the Melton South  
school through community  
donations, c. 1928-1930.**  
Fundraising activities were  
an important aspect of  
community life during this  
period.

Library Collection, Melton City Council

**Community life**

By the twentieth century, Melton's Mechanics' Institute, which had begun in the 1860s in the Agricultural Society's shed on the corner of Smith and Unitt streets, had moved to High Street. The newly-renovated hall was reopened in 1910 by the Premier of Victoria, the Hon. John Murray. It featured the addition of several new rooms and 'a fine new brick front'.<sup>34</sup> Despite agreement that the extension was needed, there was some dissension among members regarding the plans. The *Express* newspaper called for the committee to 'cease their bickering and attend to getting the work under way'.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, three bazaars organised by local women saw the community enthusiastically raise £500 for the renovations.<sup>36</sup>

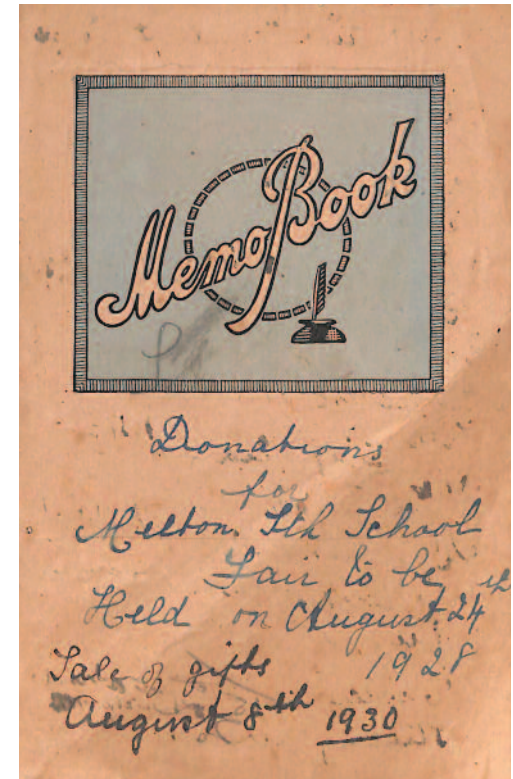
Mabel Rogers, who wrote a history of the Mechanics' Institute, described her fond memories of visiting the library as a schoolgirl in the 1930s:





I remember the oasis of light in the dark street ... and the relief of covering the short distance between the hall and my home. I remember that the walls of the room were covered with shelves, amply laden with books ... Mr A. G. Macdonald (Gordon) ... acted as librarian and would sit there, patiently, three nights a week, for, I am afraid, very little patronage ... He was noted for switching off the lights, when he thought it was time that everyone went home!<sup>37</sup>

The Exford hall (later named Victoria Hall) also opened in 1910 in Brooklyn Road, Melton South, and was a vibrant centre of community life in the area for several decades. Melton's *Express* reported that 400 people attended a Christmas party held in the large, timber building that year, with dancing 'kept going until daylight'.<sup>38</sup> The Exford hall housed the Melton Railway Station



1900-1940





School from 1911, which was supervised by Melton State School headmaster Thomas Lang. In 1923, following complaints from parents that the hall was not suitable to be used as a school, 41 students from Grades 1 to 8 moved into a new brick building. This then became the Melton South State School, No. 3717.<sup>39</sup>

The establishment of a Mechanics' Institute hall in Rockbank around 1920 was a huge boon for the community there. The land on Leakes Road was most likely donated for the purpose, or purchased through public subscription, as there was no government surveyed land in the township and therefore no public reserves. As in Melton, Rockbank's Mechanics' Institute hall served as a social and entertainment hub for the community, but also incorporated a library.<sup>40</sup>

By 1930, the population of the Shire of Melton had dropped slightly to 1,297, with just 250 in the Melton township.<sup>41</sup> Most people were therefore living on rural properties and in other small nearby towns. Before the advent of electricity, telephones and motor cars, the social lives of Melton's rural communities centred on regular visits between neighbours, attending church on Sundays and organised sports events. Receiving home-delivered groceries from the local general stores and grocers, meat from Abraham's butcher and mail deliveries from the post office was also a highlight. The locals who made these deliveries across the shire, including Len Kennedy for the Jongebloed family, Ted Radford, Hugh Nesbit and Charlie Jones, 'would go to a lot of trouble in different ways to save you making a trip', Herb Schroeder recorded.<sup>42</sup> Mary Collins (née Nixon) recalled that in 1924 she became 'the first girl to deliver mail in Melton':

Ted Mara brought the mail from the station in a horse drawn drag, it was called. He threw the mail onto the footpath. Christmas time there would be two heavy bags full. I had to drag them inside and help sort the mail for Melton, Toolern Vale and Coimadai. One time I missed five letters in the Coimadai bag and Mrs. Ross [the postmistress] made me drive her pony and buggy all the way to Coimadai on a Saturday afternoon with those letters.<sup>43</sup>

Local halls were also crucial hubs for social life in the shire, and were particularly important as centres where this widespread community could come together. They were in constant use for balls, carnivals, card parties, Saturday night dances, concerts, musical and theatrical performances, meetings, exhibitions, elections, classes, film nights, kitchen teas (held for young women prior to their weddings), wedding receptions, birthday parties and even roller skating.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM  
TOP LEFT

**Alice and Emil Jongebloed at the counter of the Jongebloed's grocery store.**

Courtesy Shane Jongebloed

**Augustus Jongebloed standing beside the delivery vehicle purchased by his father Gottfried in 1924. Nicholas (Claus) Jongebloed is inside.**

Melton & District Historical Society

**Toolern Vale hall. Local halls were crucial gathering places for the widely spread community during this period.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 1234

**Toolern Vale refreshment stall volunteers.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 1231

**Toolern Vale store.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 1678





The Progress Association held an annual competition in the Melton Mechanics' Institute hall until the beginning of World War II in 1939. Adjudicator Dr Floyd would sit on a platform created with 'a table tennis table placed on top of wooden oil or kerosene cases'.<sup>44</sup> Margaret Brooks (née Nolan) remembered dancing on the stage of the Mechanics Institute hall as a little girl in the 1930s, to the music of Tom Hogan's band, which played at the Saturday night dances.<sup>45</sup> Exford resident Herb Schroeder remembered the Hickey family providing music for the dances held in Exford and Mount Cottrell, and also in the Eynesbury woolshed.<sup>46</sup>

Local halls functioned entirely as a result of the community's support and dedication to maintaining the buildings. Several men in Melton served on the committee of the Mechanics' Institute for many decades. Bon Barrie served for 47 years. As Mabel Rogers observed, although the Melton Mechanics' Institute committee consisted entirely of men until 1963, it was the local women who managed much of the running of the hall and its many events: 'it is clear that the womenfolk were "behind the scenes" supporters'.<sup>47</sup>

Mabel recalled that for many years the supper room behind the stage could only be accessed by going outside, making the carrying of supper into the main hall an unpleasant job in bad weather. Nevertheless, countless delicious meals and refreshments were prepared over the years in the cramped kitchen, with water heated in two wood-stoked coppers: 'It was one of the necessary preparations for a function to organise someone to "bring the wood", and much scrounging occurred if that "someone" forgot!' Even during the fanciest events, ladies donned aprons over their evening gowns to help with the washing up.<sup>48</sup>

## World War I

The outbreak of World War I in August 1914 had an immediate impact on communities across Australia, and it was no different in Melton. Young men began enlisting immediately, and Australia's initial offer of 20,000 troops was soon exceeded by Victorian enlistments alone. Over the four years of the war, approximately 114,000 Victorians enlisted and around 91,000 servicemen and women were sent overseas. They came not just from Melbourne, but from all over the state; from farms, small towns and suburban areas. They included locals, newly arrived migrants and Indigenous people.<sup>49</sup>

The Australian home front was a hive of activity throughout the war, and the Melton



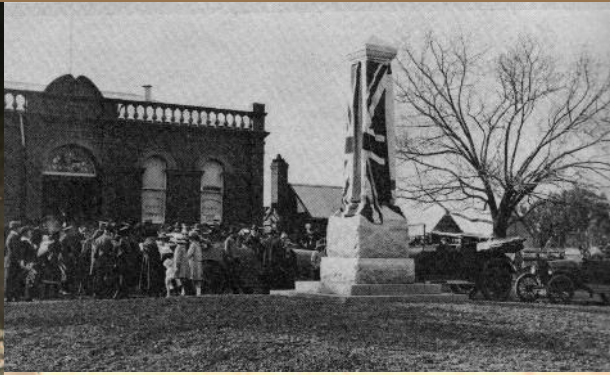
**Gunner Robert Wynne of Toolern Vale.**

Courtesy Christine Love, from the collection of Joan Jenkins

**OPPOSITE**  
**Melton residents Murdock Davey (holding the reins) and Tom and Edgar Barrie travelling to the Bacchus Marsh Show, c. 1925.**

Edna (Myers) Barrie collection





*Scarves & Knee caps are not needed  
 terribly at present -  
 Socks are always in request -  
 Then gloves, mittens, Helmets, caps,  
 Pullovers, Bed socks -*



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MELTON & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Also knitted rags - If you  
 have lots of coloured pieces  
 these could be knitted up  
 into squares & sewn up  
 in rugs -*



community played its part. Following the announcement that Australia was joining the war with Great Britain and its allies on 5 August 1914, the Melton community lost no time in launching into action. A meeting 'to assist the Red Cross fund' was held in the Melton Mechanics' Institute hall on 18 August – just days after the outbreak of the war. Collectors were appointed for each corner of the shire and individual donations were made.<sup>50</sup>

A Melton branch of the Australian Red Cross Society was formed in June 1915 and focused its energies on raising funds to purchase material that was used to make clothes for sick and wounded soldiers. A depot was established in Melton to collect clothing and other 'comfort' items for the soldiers – including reading material, tobacco, linen, canned foods and soap – and to coordinate the branch's work and activities. Local cab driver Percival Stubbs volunteered to transport all the packages to the Melton railway station, until he enlisted and departed for the front in 1916.<sup>51</sup> Such were the numbers of people getting involved that branches were also established in Toolern Vale and Rockbank.<sup>52</sup>

Regular community events were held to farewell soldiers who were leaving on active service and to welcome those who returned home. Gunner Robert (Bob) Wynne, whose uncle's family ran the general store in Toolern Vale, was presented with a pair of field glasses (binoculars), a gold watch, inscribed locket and autographed letter by the Toolern Vale community before he set sail for the front in 1916.<sup>53</sup> His mother noted that he 'sailed away in good spirits with a smile till out of sight'.<sup>54</sup>

From June 1915 to June 1919, the Melton Red Cross branch donated 2,156 pairs of socks, 1,357 shirts, 425 kit bags, 251 pillowslips, 224 towels and 121 pairs of pyjamas. Countless fundraising events were held, including jumble fairs, concerts and gift evenings. Local schools also encouraged students to contribute through fund-raising and making and collecting comforts for the soldiers.<sup>55</sup> People across the country engaged in similar activities, but Victoria's rural communities found unique ways of contributing. In Melton, people were encouraged to send rabbits and hares 'in good condition' to an exporter in Spencer Street, for export to Belgium 'for the relief of those suffering'.<sup>56</sup>

Concerts and other events were held regularly by churches, schools and other community organisations throughout the war and served the dual purpose of both raising funds for the war effort and boosting morale in the community. The war, which was initially not expected to last more than a few months, dragged out for four years and saw the loss of thousands of young men

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM  
TOP LEFT

**Australian Red Cross Society event held at the Melton Mechanics' Institute hall during the war.**

Library Collection, Melton City Council

**Unveiling of the war memorial, 1920.**

Joan Starr, *Melton: Plains of Promise*

**Knitting book, Australian Red Cross Society, c. 1916. The inscription reads: 'Scarves & knee caps are not needed terribly at present. Socks are always in request. Then gloves, mittens, helmets, caps, pullovers, bed socks. Also knitted rugs. If you have lots of coloured pieces these could be knitted up into squares & sewn up in rugs'.**

Library Collection, Melton City Council

**Members of the Australian Red Cross Society Melton Branch, 1916.**

Library Collection, Melton City Council



**Melton motor mechanic Arch Cameron with his fiancée Connie Hudson, before he embarked for the front in 1916. He was killed in action on the Somme, France, in August 1918.**

Courtesy Christine Love, from the collection of Maud Cameron

– sons, brothers and husbands – in the prime of their lives. It was an anxious, distressing, and often traumatic, period for communities across the nation, with the potential for terrible news ever present.

Some families in the Shire of Melton lost multiple members to the war. Four sons in the Nolan family enlisted and three in the Neal family. Incredibly, all survived and returned.<sup>57</sup> The family of Thomas Lang, head teacher at the Melton State School, was not so fortunate. His son, Private Horace Lang, was killed in action at Bullecourt in 1917 and another son, Lieutenant Thomas Lang, who served with the New Zealand forces, died of pneumonia in Cairo in July 1918.<sup>58</sup> In the space of one week in late October 1918, just weeks before the end of the war, the district learned with ‘profound sorrow’ of the deaths of three local servicemen. Private Lewis Norton had been killed in action somewhere in France, Corporal John Farrell had died of illness in Damascus Hospital, and Private Alexander Missen was also reported killed in action in France. Reverends George Rogers and B Williams had the terrible task of breaking the news to the men’s families. Flags at the shire hall, Mechanics’ Institute and state school were flown at half-mast in tribute.<sup>59</sup>

But of those who did make it home, few escaped unscathed. Post-war life often came with serious challenges. Many servicemen returned with significant injuries and mental trauma, requiring ongoing care and support. Melton drover Patrick Nolan served at Gallipoli with the 8th Light Horse. He was injured during an explosion, ‘sustaining bleeding to the ears and shell shock’ and returned to Australia where he convalesced at Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital. His daughter Margaret Brooks later recalled ‘the family were aware about the state of his nerves, shaking and needing a walking stick’.<sup>60</sup> Frank Neal, Patrick’s brother-in-law, was a prisoner of war and returned home ‘with only one functioning arm due to gunshot wounds and lack of treatment in the POW camp’.<sup>61</sup>

When news of the Armistice reached Melton around 8:15 pm on Monday 11 November 1918, the church and school bells rang out across the town. Residents filled the streets ‘and gave vent to their feelings ... by lustily singing the National Anthem’. Children ‘serenaded the town with an improvised band of kerosene tins’. Shire President Councillor Holden formally announced the happy news at the Mechanics’ Institute hall, ‘amidst tremendous cheering’ and more patriotic singing.<sup>62</sup> Around 10 pm, a car arrived from Melbourne carrying extraordinary editions of the *Herald* newspaper, which soon sold out. The celebrations continued for several days. Churches

held services of thanksgiving and a large and joyful crowd enjoyed a concert at the Exford hall in Melton South, with singing and dancing continuing until the early hours of the morning.<sup>63</sup> A memorial to the district's soldiers, an engraved granite obelisk, was unveiled in Melton's High Street in August 1920.<sup>64</sup>

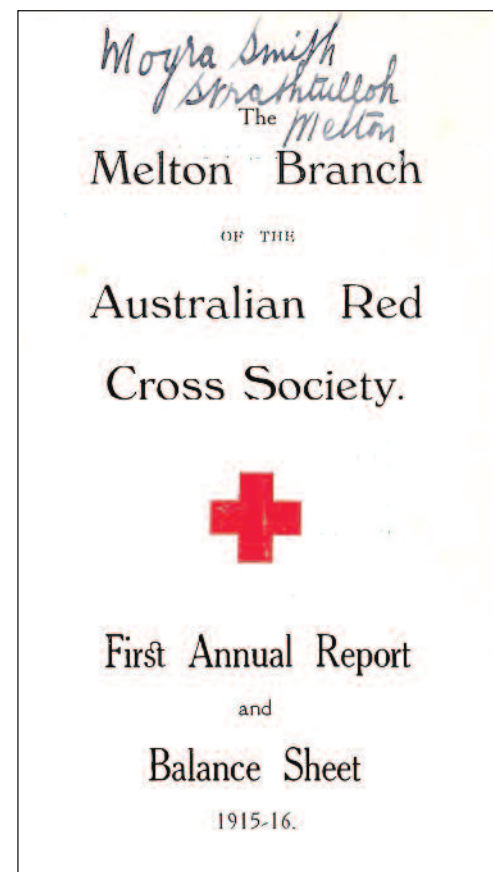
As thousands of servicemen and women began returning home from the war, supporting them became a conscious priority for the community. A local repatriation committee was formed and fundraisers turned their attentions to supporting it, with the Exford community setting up a fund specifically for sick and wounded soldiers. Employment advertisements in the local newspapers advised that preference would be given to applications from returned soldiers.<sup>65</sup>

As well as providing war pensions and medical care, state governments established settlement schemes to encourage and support ex-servicemen to return to work. In Victoria, the Closer Settlement Board's responsibilities were widened to include soldier settlement. Smaller pastoral estates, including Melton Park in the Shire of Melton, were subdivided into small farms and leased to returned soldiers.<sup>66</sup>

During the war, farmers were given guaranteed prices for their produce and agriculture was fairly prosperous. There was therefore a sense of optimism around farming at that time, and the soldier settlement scheme was expected to be a great success. It was considered a way of both rewarding ex-servicemen for the sacrifices they had made, while also boosting the agricultural industry and continuing to build on the break-up of large pastoral runs in favour of the intense cultivation and production achieved by smaller farms.<sup>67</sup>

The Melton Shire Council determined that returned soldiers should receive training before being given a farm, as 'it would be absurd to put on men who knew little or nothing of the work ... where they had no chance of making a living'.<sup>68</sup> Prominent locals, including George Minns, secretary of the local repatriation committee, provided references to the Discharged Soldiers Board for local soldiers who had returned and wished to establish themselves on farming land. Charles Ernest Barrie wrote of Colin Macdonald that he had known him for ten years, and:

He is a man of splendid character, sober, energetic and trustworthy. He has had a good training in all classes of farm work and I am confident that if he is given a fair chance he will make a success on the land.<sup>69</sup>



**Moyra Smith's copy of the first annual report of the Australian Red Cross Society Melton Branch, 1916. Moyra was the Honorary Secretary of the branch.**

Library Collection, Melton City Council

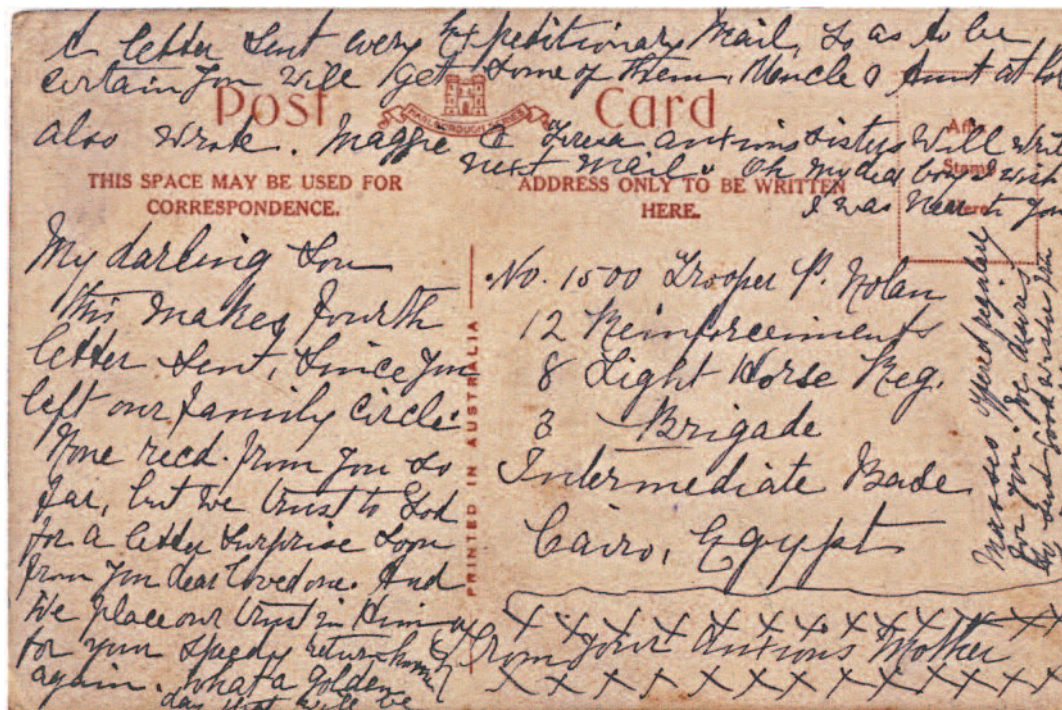


**Postcard to Melton soldier Patrick Nolan from his mother Mary, reading 'And we place our trust in Him for your speedy return home again. What a golden day that will be'. Patrick was wounded in action in 1916 and returned to Australia in 1918.**

Courtesy Christine Love, from the collection of Patricia Woodyard

Macdonald was granted a farm in the Melton Park Estate in 1920, 4,000 acres of which was made into 13 soldier settler farms. Similar to the closer settlement movement, soldier settlement saw the development of the shire's outlying villages. *The Argus* reported in 1922 that soldier settlers in Melton Park were "'making good.'" The agricultural areas are being well worked, homes have been established, and fencing is mostly completed'.<sup>70</sup> After the community petitioned the Department of Education for a school, Melton Park State School No. 4412 opened in 1928 in one room of a small cottage owned by local settler Austin Fricker.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the efforts made by local governments and communities towards making the soldier settlement scheme work, for some returned servicemen life on the land was tough, unforgiving and ultimately a failure. For others, however, it was the foundation of a new life for them and their families, and the spark for new growth and development in rural communities.



# Across the airwaves

In the 1920s, beam wireless (or radio) technology was considered a modern marvel of communication. The Melton district played a significant role in developing this emerging technology in Australia, bridging the vast distance between isolated antipodeans and the rest of the world.

Australia had enjoyed telegraph communication with Europe since 1872, via an undersea cable installed between Java and Darwin, and the Overland Telegraph Line laid from Darwin to Port Augusta in South Australia (which was already linked by telegraph to Adelaide). Thanks to this great feat of engineering, a message from London took just over a week to reach Adelaide.<sup>72</sup> This was closely followed by the first public telephone exchange, established in Sydney in 1882, and the introduction of the Marconi wireless radio system to Australia in 1905. Prime Minister Hughes made the nation's first publicly available radio broadcast in 1922.<sup>73</sup>

In 1926, the Shire of Melton became a centre of technological advancement when Rockbank was chosen as a receiver site for Amalgamated Wireless Australasia (AWA). With support from the federal government, AWA established two large beam wireless stations in Victoria: a transmitter at Fiskville, near Ballan, and a receiver site at Rockbank. Together, the two stations formed the Australian Imperial Wireless Service, and provided Australia's first international radio communication with Britain and North America. A shortwave telegraph service between Australia and Britain began in 1927 and a facsimile 'picturegram' service was provided from 1934. They were the longest radio services of this type in the world. The first 'radio picture' received at Rockbank from England was a photograph of Jimmy Melrose, the young aviator who was killed in a plane crash at Melton two years later.<sup>74</sup>

Along with various buildings filled with equipment, the receiver station in Greigs Road, Rockbank included two towering antennas supported by huge steel masts standing 91.5 metres tall, with reflectors directed to the United Kingdom and Canada. A large recreation and administration building was surrounded by smaller buildings for staff accommodation. Given the station's isolated location and the need for a large number of staff to be on site 24 hours a day, it was equipped with plenty of comforts to ensure that it was comfortable for employees and an



**Staff member George Condon checks the antenna feeds outside the operations centre of the Overseas Telecommunications Commission (OTC) at Rockbank.**

Courtesy Kevin Condon

attractive place to live and work. The buildings were connected to electricity and running water, and set within formally landscaped gardens.<sup>75</sup>

The Overseas Telecommunications Commission (OTC) took over the management of the station from 1947, and continued AWA's work in communications research and development. For the local community in Rockbank, the station created jobs and was a great social benefit, bringing new people to the area. One Melton local, George Condon, worked at the station for over 30 years, riding his bicycle to Rockbank and back to Melton each day. As well as general maintenance of the grounds, his role included driving children who lived at the station to the Rockbank State School, and collecting mail and supplies from the Rockbank store in Leakes Road.<sup>76</sup>

With new technologies – satellites, computers and coaxial cables – superseding beam wireless technology, the Rockbank receiving station closed in 1969. While the equipment has been removed, the main staff residential quarters remains intact today and the site is recognised as holding national heritage significance.<sup>77</sup>

During World War II, Melton once again played a significant role in the development of international radio communication. To assist with operations in the Pacific, the United States defence forces constructed a receiving station at Rockbank and a transmitting station at Diggers Rest.<sup>78</sup> After an extensive search across Victoria for suitable land, the isolated locations of Rockbank and Diggers Rest were chosen for the quiet conditions they offered for long-range wireless reception and transmission.<sup>79</sup>

As World War II moved northwards, the United States' radio communication infrastructure moved with it and the facilities in Rockbank and Diggers Rest were no longer of use. They were vacated by American forces and ownership of the stations was transferred to the Australian Army in 1943.<sup>80</sup> The stations continued to operate as part of the British Commonwealth Army Wireless Chain.

Post war, the facilities proved useful for purposes other than defence communications, such as transmitting news across the world during the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games. A large steel structure with a curved roof, reminiscent of a Nissen hut, was built by the Australian Army at the Diggers Rest site in 1944. Today it is the only significant wartime building remaining on either the Diggers Rest or Rockbank sites.<sup>81</sup> The Woodlea housing development is being constructed on land once occupied by the Rockbank station, now in the suburb of Aintree.<sup>82</sup>



### Progress amidst hardship

Just as Australians were beginning to get back on their feet after the long period of war, the roaring 1920s ended in a severe economic depression. Although he enjoyed growing up on a Melton farm, Hugh Barrie recalled working long hours during the Great Depression of the 1930s, in order to make ends meet:

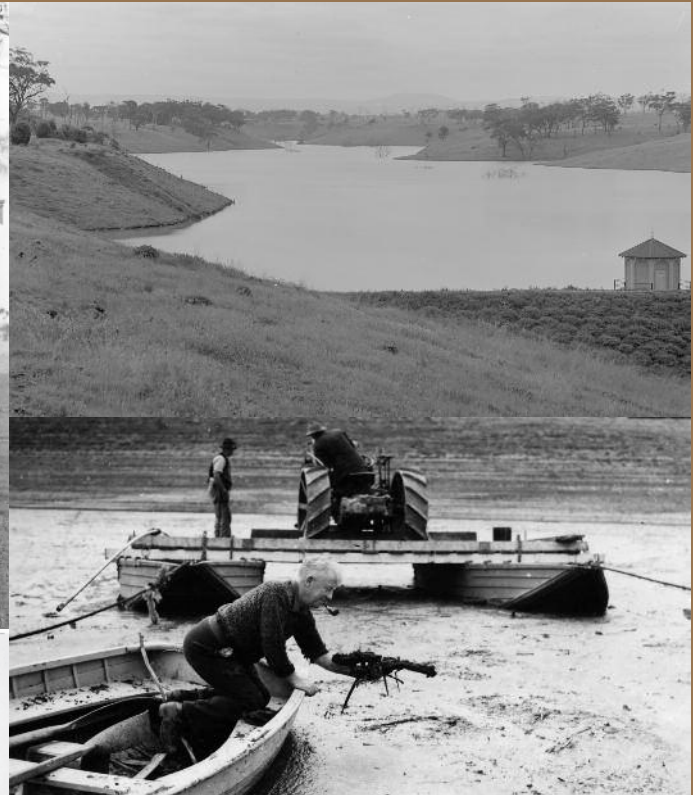
I can remember when going to school ... staying home to assist with milking by hand of twenty-five to thirty cows before breakfast ... to be completed by twenty past six every morning, then after breakfast being ready to start work in the harvest paddocks at seven a.m. continuing until six-thirty p.m. The horses were then unharnessed and milking finished before tea. Bedtime came after nine p.m. ... This was the daily routine.

It was crucial to finish the milking in time for the cans of milk to be collected and taken to Melbourne, once a day in winter and twice in summer.<sup>83</sup>

The hardship of the depression was exacerbated in Melton by drought. Bryan Jongebloed later recalled that with little capacity for water storage, people queued 'in drays, 20 and 30 long, for water from a bore' that was located where the golf course is today.<sup>84</sup> As it had done during World War I, the local community came together and supported each other during this difficult time. Business owners generously supplied families with items on credit that in many cases would never be paid for. The door to the Jongebloed's bakery 'was never locked and those who wished could help themselves'.<sup>85</sup>

Herb Schroeder recalled fortune-seekers travelling from Melbourne looking for ways to make money: 'Some would sleep under the old wooden bridge over the Werribee river just down from the spillway and would have a singsong to the mouth organ at night time'. Some were attracted by the potential for hunting in the district, with good quality rabbit skins fetching a shilling each and fox skins around 25 shillings each in the winter months. The dense bush of Eynesbury was a popular target of illegal possum hunters.<sup>86</sup> The final train to Melbourne on Sundays was known as the 'Rabbit Train', Bon Barrie later recalled, with the last two carriages set aside for hunters, their dogs and the spoils of their weekend of hunting in Melton.<sup>87</sup>

Some enterprising Meltonians did not let the economic downturn stop them from pursuing entrepreneurial endeavours. Robert Butler, who had only recently finished secondary school, left



his family farm to start his own successful business making and selling radio sets in a building adjoining the Golden Fleece Hotel. He also started selling oil and petrol, and had an ice round, sourcing ice in bulk from Werribee and delivering it around Melton in a large trailer. Robert later recalled 'at times I wasn't sure where the next meal was coming from', but his radio business, the Arbee Wireless Company, was so successful that he soon moved to the larger town of Bacchus Marsh.<sup>88</sup>

While World War I and the economic depression of the 1930s coloured the experiences of many during the early years of the twentieth century, it was also a time of change and progress, with many social and technological advances being made. Despite great challenges, the Shire of Melton continued to grow and progress, and life went on.

Greyhound coursing continued as a popular leisure activity in the district in the early twentieth century. The local newspaper described it, in fact, as 'quite a craze. Hares were plentiful on the Melton plains and greyhounds provided a good betting outlet'.<sup>89</sup> The newspaper featured regular reports on events held by the Melton Coursing Club, which attracted many spectators from Melbourne. The visitors travelled to coursing meetings at Melton Park in Plumpton by train and horse transport, mostly to avoid driving cars over the rough and muddy roads of the area. Locals were warned, before upcoming events, not to frighten the hares away.<sup>90</sup>

Although horse breeding and racing was an established and popular tradition in the district by the 1900s, one horse is credited with raising the profile of the industry in Melton during this period. The Welkin was bred in England and brought to Melton in 1910 as the foundation sire of Ernest Clarke's Melton stud. Clarke, brother of Sir Rupert, enjoyed remarkable success with his champion stallion. By the time of the horse's death in 1925, The Welkin had sired 41 individual winners, with total winnings of almost £600,000. His most celebrated offspring, Gloaming, achieved 57 wins from 67 starts and won a then-record of £86,000 in prize money. The Welkin was buried at the entry gates to Clarke's Melton stud under an inscribed marble headstone, as the racing world mourned the loss of 'one of the most successful sires that ever did stud duty in Australia'.<sup>91</sup>

Horse racing flourished in the district during this period despite the resolution of the shire council in 1916 to reduce the number of race and sports meetings during World War I.<sup>92</sup> This was both a practicality, given that so many young men who had been playing sport in the district were enlisting, but also seen as a matter of propriety and morals – as it was felt that in the spirit of



**Tom Collins junior in one of the first cars in Melton, bought by Tom Collins senior, c. 1925. The original purchaser was Harold Werribee Staughton.**

Donated by Anne Collins to the Melton & District Historical Society, 1415

**OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**

**Students outside Rockbank School, c. 1930-1950.**

Photographer Charles Edward Boyles. State Library Victoria, H2008.122/365

**Melton Reservoir, c. 1920-1954.**

Rose Stereograph Co. State Library Victoria, H32492/4102

**Melton Reservoir, c. 1930-1937.**

Victoria State Rivers and Water Supply Commission. State Library Victoria, RWP/236

**Jim Johnson, caretaker of Melton Reservoir (Exford Weir), at the caretaker's quarters in 1916.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 1293

**Melton State School, 1933.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 595





patriotism, the community should be spending its free time contributing the war effort, rather than enjoying leisure activities. 'Fair Play' wrote to the *Gisborne Gazette* in June 1916 to draw readers' attention to the fact that:

One has only to go to Melton tennis court, on any Saturday afternoon, and you will find there some of the so-called patriotic men and ladies spending their spare time hitting a ball backwards and forward, which could be better spent making comforts and other useful articles for our footballers already on the battlefield.<sup>93</sup>

The honorary secretary of the Melton Football Club responded in the newspaper the following week that he saw 'no reason why we should not indulge in a healthful exercise'.<sup>94</sup> The Melton Football Club won the premiership in 1914, but the local competition soon lost many of its players to the war. Post-war, however, the team rallied and took out the premiership again in 1919.<sup>95</sup> The Melton Racing Club suffered such a financial loss after a meeting in 1927 was washed out by heavy rain that it could not continue.<sup>96</sup> Golf was introduced to the district by the station master, Mr W Dunne, the same year, and the Melton Valley Golf Club was formed in 1932.<sup>97</sup>

### Car racing champion

Joan Richmond grew up on a farm near Melton, the granddaughter of Harry Staughton of Exford (and great-granddaughter of prominent pastoral landowner Simon Staughton). She was a keen horse rider, training and riding her own racehorses at Warrawong, a property on the Exford estate. Joan had ambitions to pursue a career as a jockey, until women were banned from the sport.<sup>98</sup>

Following a trip by motor car to Queensland in 1926, Joan began competing in car club race events, in which women were permitted to compete alongside men. In 1931, she raced in the Australian Grand Prix at Phillip Island, placing fifth. With four friends, Joan then embarked on a driving trip through Asia and the Middle East to the starting line of the Monte Carlo Rally in Sicily, Italy. She enjoyed a successful international racing career throughout the 1930s, while based in England. Joan returned to Australia when World War II broke out but was unable to continue her racing career due to a lack of sponsorship. She died in Melbourne in 1999 and her personal collection is now held by the National Museum of Australia.<sup>99</sup>

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

**Shooting and hunting were popular pastimes in the Melton district.**

Melton & District Historical Society

**Members of the Melton Coursing Club in a paddock near Diggers Rest. The plentiful hares around Diggers Rest made it an important location for greyhound coursing.**

Melton & District Historical Society

**Floodwaters entering the Werribee River from the Melton Reservoir, June 1952.**

State Library Victoria, RWP/15204

**The view from Mt Cottrell during a drought. Melton's dry climate meant that for many decades the community has often faced the threat of bushfires and the lack of a reliable water supply.**

Melton City Council



**Joan Richmond, second from left, grew up in Melton and forged a successful international career as a race car driver.**

Photographer London Agency Photos Ltd.  
State Library Victoria, H2001.135/217

The early twentieth century saw the advent of one of the most dramatic changes witnessed in Melton since the days of the gold rush: the motor car. Brothers James (known as Ted) and Charles (known as Ernie) Barrie bought their cars in 1916 and were among the first people in Melton to own a car.<sup>100</sup> The road to Melbourne was only wide enough for a single car, and Bon Barrie later recounted an incident that occurred when his family, travelling along the road in their T-model Ford, were blocked by a house in the process of being moved: 'After the house was jacked up by removalists, the 'T' model, with hood and windscreen folded down, passed underneath'.<sup>101</sup>

As Melton residents started buying cars, Victoria's Country Roads Board, formed in 1914, set about bituminising and improving the quality of the shire's roads. Many new roads were constructed during the breakup of large pastoral estates in the closer settlement period, but road maintenance was not a priority. Roads and bridges were largely a means to an end, providing access to the railway stations, from where goods could be transported over large distances via train. In 1918, the council discussed increasing the tax on motor cars in order to fund the maintenance and repair of the shire's roads, as it was agreed that most of the damage done to the roads was caused by the vehicles. However, it was only after the Great Depression of the 1930s that cars became more affordable and road transport assumed dominance over the railways.<sup>102</sup>

Margaret Brooks (née Nolan), who grew up in Melton during the depression, remembers her father working on the construction of Ballarat Road around Anthony's Cutting:

He was a hard-working labourer on the road gang. The horse-drawn wagons were used to take the rocks and hand-crushed metal to the work site, and sometimes rode with my father on the wagon. After work the horses were taken down the creek (Toolern) to be groomed and washed.<sup>103</sup>

Another development in the name of progress during this period was the construction of the Melton Reservoir (also known as the Exford Weir) at Melton South by the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission over a period of three years from 1913 to 1916. However, it supplied water to the Werribee Irrigation District, not to the Shire of Melton.<sup>104</sup> The Melton community fought hard for its own, reliable water supply, and although it was a popular topic of discussion and debate for many years, water continued to be a major issue of concern for the district. Farmers



without a nearby creek sought water on their properties via dams, wells and tanks, and several local dams served as public watering holes for stock.<sup>105</sup> The community was forced to transport water using drays laden with tanks, during times of drought and acute water shortage.<sup>106</sup>

Although the Melton Reservoir was not a source of water for the people of the shire, it did serve a recreational purpose. A clearing sale was held at the reservoir in September 1916 soon before its completion, a local newspaper reporting that 'a very large crowd assembled, some for the sight-seeing, others for bargains. Truly it was a grand site [sic] to see such a fine body of water in our dry district'.<sup>107</sup> It became a popular place for water sports, fishing (it was stocked with red-fin and trout), duck shooting and picnicking, attracting visitors from across the district and from Melbourne each weekend.<sup>108</sup> Ernest Clarke, whose residence was nearby, used his motor boat on the weir. A local newspaper reported that he was 'practically at the seaside, as he only has to step out of the back door into the boat and enjoy himself'.<sup>109</sup>

While water was a serious issue of concern for the Shire of Melton, so too was fire. From the beginnings of European settlement on the dry plains of Melton, the community became all too familiar with the destructive power of bushfires. Fires spread rapidly through the parched landscape and were difficult to stop. Small villages in the district were practically wiped out by different fires at various times, important buildings and valuable haystacks were lost, and most chaff mills were burned down more than once.<sup>110</sup> A local bushfire brigade was established in 1935, with Constable Ray Corbett elected Captain. This formed the basis of what would later become the Melton Country Fire Authority (CFA) branch.<sup>111</sup>

### **From darkness into light**

In 1939, Melton's connection to mains electricity marked a major turning point in the modernisation of the shire. Historically, kerosene lamps were commonly used but were both expensive and dangerous. Hugh Barrie remembered helping with the milking on his family's dairy farm before school, 'using a hurricane lantern to help me round up the cows on winter mornings'.<sup>112</sup> The installation of acetylene gas lighting from the mid-1900s was considered a major step forward. The Mechanics' Institute hall was lit using acetylene gas in 1906 and by the 1920s a generator, although this was used sparingly.<sup>113</sup> The Staughton memorial lamp in High Street was lit with acetylene gas from 1907, and was said to give 'a splendid light'. This form of gas lighting was

**The Staughton memorial lamp in Melton's High Street, c. 1909.**

Edna (Myers) Barrie collection



also installed in the post office, making it 'quite up to date', and in various businesses in the town including the Royal Hotel, Golden Fleece Hotel, Jongebloed's bakery and M'Nicoll's Hotel (formerly Minns' Hotel).<sup>114</sup>

A few hundred people from all corners of the shire and beyond converged on the township for an official ceremony on 20 December 1939, in which the switch was flicked on Melton's electrification. The ceremony was performed by Mrs Lola Robinson, wife of councillor and previous Shire President GE Robinson, who had spearheaded the project. Using a pair of gold scissors to cut a ribbon strung between two miniature electricity towers, she was reported to have said, 'I now have pleasure in cutting this ribbon and transforming the township of Melton from darkness into light'. It must have been a spectacular sight, as streets, verandahs and the windows of houses and businesses were immediately bathed in bright light. Coloured globes illuminated the shire hall and Mechanics' Institute, where a 'Switching-on Ball' was held in 'a blaze of light and colour'. Dancers were impressed by a dance floor 'that had been electrically planed to give a new glassy surface'.<sup>115</sup> Ten nearby farms were to be connected in the new year.<sup>116</sup> Rockbank had already been electrified some months before, and electricity was extended to Melton South in early 1940.<sup>117</sup>

It was an exciting development that demonstrated Melton's increasing modernisation. A local newspaper declared 'an air of progressiveness has suddenly descended' on the district.<sup>118</sup> However, the newly illuminated streets could do nothing to brighten the dark shadow of another war looming on the horizon.

### **Toolern Vale Bird Sanctuary**

The Norwood Naturalists Cabin was established by local apiarist Vernon Davey as part of his Toolern Vale Bird Sanctuary on his property Melliodora Park in 1933. The area was (and remains today) abundant with bird life, and the building proved popular as a bird observation cabin. Vernon was an enthusiastic member of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union. Fellow bird enthusiast, John Gray, reported in the union's magazine in 1934:

Even in winter one can record between fifty and sixty species of birds without any difficulty in this 240 acre sanctuary, whilst in the spring and summer months, visiting and nomadic species often bring the bird list up into the neighbourhood of seventy ... It behoves Melbourne ornithologists to see that interest in this fine area is not allowed to wane.<sup>119</sup>

The sanctuary was regularly visited by birdwatchers up until the 1960s, and was particularly associated with the Gould League's 'Bird Day', when school children visited for a day of studying the birds and the natural environment of the area. The Naturalists Cabin has been carefully restored and is a valued piece of Melton's heritage.<sup>120</sup>



**Observation cabin at the Toolern Vale Bird Sanctuary, 1935.**

Museums Victoria Collections, BA 1345





## CHAPTER 5

# Open for Progress

1940–1980



*Melton's ideal situation leaves the path open for progress ... The people who are already enjoying the advantages of living in developing Melton agree with the experts about the future of the area ... Cr. T. L. Barrie, former Shire President, had this to say about Melton: 'There is no doubt that Melton will go ahead. The area has everything to offer to attract people here'.<sup>1</sup>*

*The Footscray Advertiser, 1965*

**1 THE LAND**  
Dreamtime to 1835

**2 DIVERGENT STORIES**  
1835 to 1850

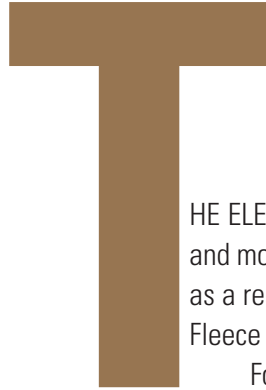
**3 A COMMUNITY EMERGES**  
1850 to 1900  
Population in 1865: 1,000

**4 TRANSFORMATIONS**  
1900 to 1940  
Population in 1919: 1,700

**5 OPEN FOR PROGRESS**  
1940 to 1980  
Population in 1973: 9,500

**6 A CITY FOR THE FUTURE**  
1980 to 2018  
Population in 2016: 135,443

1940–1980



THE ELECTRIFICATION OF MELTON in 1939 was a glimpse at the rapid and intense development and modernisation that was soon to come. Life and work in the shire changed in countless ways as a result, and the town even sported its first neon sign, added to the newly renovated Golden Fleece Hotel in 1940.<sup>2</sup>

For some residents in outer lying areas of the shire, however, electrification and the progress that came with it took several more years, and life continued in much the same way that it had done for decades. Malcolm Peacock grew up in Rockbank in the 1940s without electricity or running water. He remembers using hurricane lamps for light, his father using a separator to turn milk into cream, and his mother making butter. Malcolm and several other children rode horses each day to the Rockbank School.<sup>3</sup> The booming development and phenomenal growth that would come to characterise the shire in the second half of the twentieth century was still some years off, as the community faced the challenges of yet another world war.

#### PREVIOUS PAGES

**Aerial view of the Melton Shire, 1946.**

Melton City Council

**Transmission line at Diggers Rest used for international radio communication, 1943.**

Australian War Memorial, 051997

#### OPPOSITE

**Plane spotting tower erected in Melton's High Street for use by members of the Melton Volunteer Observers' Corps to look out for approaching aircraft.**

Library Collection, Melton City Council

## World War II

On 3 September 1939, Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies announced on radio that the nation was at war. Almost a million Australians went on to serve in World War II, fighting campaigns against German and Italian forces in Europe, the Mediterranean and North Africa, and against Japanese forces in south-east Asia and the Pacific.<sup>4</sup>

Stephen Hirt remembers many locals from the Shire of Melton going by train to Melbourne to enlist. As the chaff and food production industries were considered so important to the nation, however, the skills of many Meltonians were needed more urgently at home. Stephen's own father never ended up going to war but instead worked for over 20 years in a local chaff mill, which



made blue-string chaff – known as one of the best chaffs in the world.<sup>5</sup> Due to a shortage of motor fuel during wartime, the shire's farmers resurrected their old horse-drawn vehicles. No grain was grown in the district at all during the war, due to the need for chaff to feed the horses, and much of the hay went towards defence orders.<sup>6</sup> Following the war, the situation reversed, with the chaff industry going into decline and the demand for grain increasing. Much of the chaff grown in and around Melton in the post-war period went to local racehorse trainers and Gippsland dairy farmers. But gradually, demand continued to decline as cheaper, processed feed alternatives were developed.<sup>7</sup>

As it had done with such dedication during World War I, communities in all corners of the shire came together to support the war effort. A Queen Carnival was held over three months in 1941. Four 'queens' were chosen from Melton, Melton South, Rockbank and Toolern Vale. They raised over £1,500, the most by Doris Butler of Melton South, and a large crowd gathered at the Melton Mechanics' Institute hall to see her crowned as the winner.<sup>8</sup> The shire community raised £600 in just three months in 1942 in order to purchase an ambulance that was presented by Shire President John Beaty to the Australian Army Medical Corps through the Victorian branch of the Australian Red Cross Society.<sup>9</sup> Members of the Melton Country Women's Association branch, which had been established in 1938 just before the war, made camouflage nets and food packages, held fundraising events and sewed quilts to send to British children.<sup>10</sup> All soldiers' wives were made honorary members of the branch.<sup>11</sup>

The shire's flat terrain and airfields made it an important site for airforce activities during the war. Locals remember that part of the Eynesbury estate was used as an aircraft bombing range.<sup>12</sup> The war arrived unexpectedly in a Toolern Vale paddock one day in 1940, when an Avro Ansen bomber aircraft was forced to make an emergency landing. The pilot had lost his way in heavy fog while searching for another plane that had disappeared (later found to have crashed near Eildon), and was guided in to land by a local farmer, Bob McCorkell, flashing his torch. A crowd of people gathered in the paddock the next day to see the repaired plane take off back to the RAAF base at Point Cook.<sup>13</sup>

While World War I over two decades earlier had seemed impossibly remote and distant for Australians at home, once Japan entered World War II in 1942, the battlefronts of the Pacific were much closer to home and the potential threat of invasion very real. Children of that era remember digging air raid shelters and being kept home from school to help on the family farm.



1940-1980



Attendance at Melton State School declined markedly during the years of the Depression and World War II, from 75 pupils in 1931 to 42 in 1946.<sup>14</sup> Robert Beaty, who started at Toolern Vale State School during the war, later recalled 'One lady teacher insisted on teaching air raid drill which consisted of lying under the desks with rubbers in our mouths. This we looked forward to – a diversion from work'.<sup>15</sup>

Meltonians were among the 33,000 Australian civilians who volunteered to listen out and watch the skies for aircraft, both enemy and allied.<sup>16</sup> A 24-hour watch was established in the shire hall, with mattresses set up for people to sleep on in between shifts. In 1944, a tower was erected in Melton's High Street, allowing members of the Melton Volunteer Observers' Corps clear views to spot aircraft approaching from any direction. The elevated cabin included a balcony, allowing volunteers 'space to stretch their legs'.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, Rockbank and Diggers Rest became important centres of international military communication. Rockbank had already demonstrated its suitability for radio transmission with the success of the beam wireless station established there in 1926. In April 1942, a Rockbank farm owned by the Gidney family was compulsorily acquired for the construction of a radio shortwave receiving station, established by the United States Army. A transmission station was constructed in nearby Diggers Rest. The isolation, quiet, and flat terrain of these areas (without the interruption of mountains), provided ideal conditions for long-range radio communication.<sup>18</sup>

These were the darkest days of Australia's involvement in the war. Just weeks before, Australians' worst fears had been realised, when Darwin was bombed by the Japanese. United States General Douglas MacArthur arrived in Australia soon after, to coordinate the offensive against Japanese forces. The receiving and transmission stations in the Shire of Melton were part of a communication network during a critical period for the allies' campaign in the Pacific, connecting Melbourne with United States' Army bases across the world, including America, China, India and the top end of Australia.<sup>19</sup>

When the war ended on 8 May 1945, bells rang throughout the district. A holiday was declared at the Toolern Vale State School, where 'the school ground had never emptied so quickly', Robert Beaty later recalled, 'as children raced home to spread the good news'.<sup>20</sup> Services of thanksgiving were held in halls and churches throughout the shire. Forty returned men and women were welcomed home at an event held at the Melton Mechanics' Institute hall in January 1946.<sup>21</sup>

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM  
TOP LEFT

**The Avro Ansen bomber aircraft that was forced to make an emergency landing in a Toolern Vale paddock in 1940, and was guided in to land by a local farmer. (Pictures one and two.)**

Library Collection, Melton City Council

**Lance Corporal Knowles and Lance Corporal Schuck working at the transmitters and control panels at land headquarters signals, Diggers Rest, 1945.**

Australian War Memorial, 115348

**Signalman Russell Errol Hill at his station at Rockbank Signal Receiving Station, 1967.**

Australian War Memorial, P07435.001



**Members of the Melton Urban Fire Brigade. The volunteer power of local fire brigades has been crucial to protecting the community from the destruction wrought by fire.**

Courtesy EE and EW Barrie

### **Fighting fire**

From the earliest days of settlement in the shire, residents demonstrated their willingness to band together in times of crisis and need. Bushfires were always a terrifying prospect and since its establishment in 1935, the local fire brigade (later the Country Fire Authority) fought hard to protect the people, homes and animals of the shire. In 1966, the Mount Cottrell Fire Brigades Group was formed as a way of consolidating the smaller groups around Melton, Rockbank, Toolern Vale, Sydenham, Truganina and Werribee. Its headquarters were established at the home of Ernest 'Bon' and Edna Barrie in Ferris Road, Melton. Captain Bon Barrie was a member of the Melton Fire Brigade and elected group and communications officer of the new Mount Cottrell Brigades Group.<sup>22</sup> Wendy Barrie, daughter of Edna and Bon, remembers the fire truck parked at their house and her mother operating the fire brigade's radio. Growing up in the fire station headquarters, Wendy and her siblings learned how to use the radio too, in case of emergencies.<sup>23</sup>



## Post-war development

The end of the war marked the beginning of a period of intense development and change in the shire. The increasing mechanisation of farming equipment saw significant changes to both farming practices and to the landscape, with many dry stone walls removed to allow easier access to paddocks for large machinery, such as ploughs, headers and seed drills.<sup>24</sup>

Booming residential development in the 1950s and 1960s saw the decline of much commercial farming in the shire, as it became increasingly more populated. From the 1950s, subdivisions of large amounts of farming land began on a scale not seen since the early 1900s. Brick veneer homes proliferated, many built by Ted Overs. The first is believed to have been built in the early 1950s at 6 Exford Road in Melton South for chaff mill owner Bernie Trethowan.

A builder and contractor from Moonee Ponds, Ted Overs is recognised today as the municipality's first modern residential estate developer. He made an indelible mark on the Shire of Melton, both in terms of its physical development and its social life.<sup>25</sup> Ted Overs was active in the local community, and was president of the Melton football and tennis clubs. He built six weatherboard houses as part of a subdivision in Station Road West, advertised in the local paper in 1959 as modern homes on a half-acre block, with a tiled roof, three bedrooms, modern kitchen and electric copper, stove and hot water service.<sup>26</sup> As well as subdivisions along Station Road, he developed land west of Station Road, the First Avenue subdivision and property south of Barries Road, between Station Road and Toolern Creek. This corner of the subdivision included his own brick veneer home, 160 Station Road, where Ted moved with his family. The streets in the Christopher Crescent and Joan Street subdivision were named after his children.<sup>27</sup>

By the 1960s, other developers were at work in the shire, offering different designs and package deals to residents. The first of the larger residential estates, after the subdivisions of the 1950s, was on the northern side of the highway.<sup>28</sup> Delphic Realty offered five-year terms on their Melton Views Estate development in 1964. Advertised as a place to 'relax and live in the quiet of the countryside', Melton Views Estate featured water and electricity, although 'wide bitumen roads and footpaths provided at vendor's expense'.<sup>29</sup> Riverview Estate was another development on land at Melton South that had been previously acquired by the Exell family during the closer settlement period.<sup>30</sup> Rockbank Estates Pty Ltd was responsible for large subdivisions and sales of residential land, with most purchasers coming from the inner west, looking for a small rural block or hobby farm.<sup>31</sup>

**GEELONG - BACCHUS MARSH DISTRICT**

**"STAUGHTON VALE"**

**AN IDEAL STUD FARM**

**Fattening and Agricultural Property - - Rich River Flats**

**1900 ACRES 1900**

NOT  
FOR  
LOAN



VIEW OF HOMESTEAD

**FOR SALE BY PUBLIC AUCTION**

at The Geelong Wool Exchange,

**FRIDAY, 23rd JUNE, 1950, at 2.30 p.m.**

**DALGETY and COMPANY LIMITED**

(Incorporated in England)

GEELONG, MELBOURNE and ALL BRANCHES

**L. A. FAIRBAIRN & COMPANY**

MELBOURNE, BACCHUS MARSH, BALLAN





As well as residential developments, the shire was also experiencing technological advances and the need for more municipal services. The Arbee Wireless Company, a radio business started by Melton local Robert Butler in the 1920s, sold televisions in the 1950s.<sup>32</sup> The Barrie family had one of the first televisions in the district, which cost them a small fortune of £199. They welcomed the community into their living room to watch the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games.<sup>33</sup>

A new shire hall was erected in 1958 and the first meeting of the council held there in February 1959. The old council building was demolished after 90 years, and the new hall was later extended over the site. The new premises provided space for additional administrative and technical staff, as well as council chambers and an infant welfare centre.<sup>34</sup> Melton's first health centre for babies and children was established in the Mechanics' Institute hall in the mid-1940s, at the instigation of the Melton Country Women's Association, which held a ball to raise funds.<sup>35</sup> The centre moved into the new shire offices in 1958. Maureen Jongebloed, who was the secretary of the baby health centre committee, recalls a meeting being held to discuss the possibility of starting a kindergarten, which drew a flood of interest. The shire's first kindergarten was subsequently opened at West Melton in 1960.<sup>36</sup>

Further extensions were made to the shire hall in 1963, but as the population of the shire surged, several new service authorities were formed and required even more administrative office space: the Waterworks Trust, the Sewerage Authority, Health Services and the Building Surveying



OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

**An advertisement for the sale of Staughton Vale stud farm, 1950.**

Library Collection, Melton City Council

**The opening of the new Melton Council office building in 1959.**

Library Collection, Melton City Council

**160 Station Road in Melton South, built for local estate developer Ted Overs in the 1950s.**

Melton City Council

**Brick homes like these were popular with new families moving to the area in the post-war period.**

Courtesy Nicole Hilder

LEFT

**Members of the Melton branch of the Country Women's Association visiting the Maddingley coal mine in Bacchus Marsh in 1956.**

Beth McDonald collection



Department.<sup>37</sup> Concrete footpaths were laid in Melton and Melton South in the 1960s 'supplying a long-felt want' and new shops began opening in Melton's High Street, including a new post office, haberdashery and hairdressing business.<sup>38</sup>

The development that had arguably the greatest impact in encouraging population growth in the shire during this period, was the establishment of a reliable water supply for the district. This had been a major concern of the local community for over 100 years, since the Melton township was first founded. Despite various schemes over the years to create a reliable water supply, the district was still dependent on bores, wells and tanks when the Melton Waterworks Trust was established in 1961 to address Melton's water woes. With the opening of the Djerriwarrh Dam in December 1963, the shire's residents finally had access to a reticulated water supply. The opening of the dam was a joyous occasion attended by the Governor of Victoria. British celebrity Sabrina turned on the water, sending it through the pipes and into Melton homes.<sup>39</sup> When shire engineer Tony Carberry turned on a tap and hosed his lawn on completion of the dam, *The Age* newspaper enthused 'He was the first man in Melton ever to do so'.<sup>40</sup>

Tony Carberry predicted that one immediate effect of the reliable water supply would be that residents would start growing gardens, and 'after that we hope to attract secondary industry to the town'. It certainly led to a surge in development and growth, as Melton became a much more attractive place to live. By 1965, plans were in place for the establishment of a sewerage authority. Another new dam was to be built for Melton, and an extended underground drainage scheme was in progress.<sup>41</sup>

Melton Development Association was formed in 1961 to raise funds to support development and encourage the growth of industry in the shire. The association's secretary and later president, farmer Jeff Robinson, told a local newspaper in 1965, 'If we get industries to set up here, the area will really boom ... Wherever we see that we can help advancement in any way, within the limits of our available funds, we will do so'.<sup>42</sup> True to their word, members of the Melton Development Association took advantage of the land set aside for future parks and gardens in the shire, to grow hay. After a community working bee to harvest the hay, the crop was turned into chaff and the profits generated were put into the development fund to assist with the establishment of modern amenities and parklands for the shire. In 1964 this effort raised £1,000. *The Footscray Advertiser* described the project as the kind of 'initiative and community spirit that is helping put Melton on the map'.<sup>43</sup>

## Community stalwart

Edna Barrie is one of countless women who have played a crucial role in the Melton community over its history. She was a tireless volunteer and a stalwart of the community who helped to keep many organisations running and thriving. Edna was born in 1918 into a family with deep roots in Melton. Her grandmother Ann Dowling arrived in the colony from Ireland with her two sisters in 1855. Ann purchased land in Melton and settled on the Ballarat Road (High Street) at Ryans Creek with her husband Henry Myers. The three Dowling sisters had ten children between them who attended Melton State School No. 430, as did Edna.<sup>44</sup>

Edna was involved with the Melton branch of the Country Women's Association for 50 years and was an active member of the Melton Mechanics' Institute and the Melton Uniting Church throughout her life. She was involved with the local CFA branch from 1942. As a member of the CFA's Women's Auxiliary, Edna helped raise funds and provide meals to the firefighters.<sup>45</sup> Edna was a founding member of the Melton & District Historical Society in 1968, and was passionate about preserving and sharing local history. The formation of the society at that time, during a period of increasingly rapid growth for the municipality, was crucial, ensuring that many photos, documents and stories of early Melton were not lost.<sup>46</sup>



## OPPOSITE

**An invitation to a grand ball held to celebrate the inauguration of the Melton Water Supply Scheme, 1963.**

Library Collection, Melton City Council

**Turning on the water at Djerriwarrh Dam, 1963. Stan Atkin (on the truck), Eric Rogers and television personality Sabrina.**

Library Collection, Melton City Council

## LEFT

**Edna Barrie (née Myers) with her husband Ernest 'Bon' Barrie.**

Edna (Myers) Barrie collection



# The day Toolern Vale burned



**The view over Toolern Vale  
after the 1965 fire.**

Melton & District Historical Society

On Tuesday 11 March 1965 'the most destructive fire ever to attack the district left a 12-mile of desolation and heartbreak' between Toolern Vale and Rockbank.<sup>47</sup> 'A pall of smoke hundreds of feet high' could be seen from Melbourne's western suburbs.<sup>48</sup> Edna Barrie, who had been in Ballarat for the day, heard the news and hurried home: 'I will never forget the sight. I was driving down the Pentland Hills and saw the smoke ... in wisps high up in the sky'. She arrived at the Mechanics' Institute hall in Melton to find that it had been transformed into a crisis centre, with members of the Country Women's Association and Red Cross Society providing food, first-aid and comfort: 'People had been affected by smoke and dust ... others were arriving in what they stood up in having lost all their possessions'.<sup>49</sup>

The fire crossed the Western Highway, consuming houses, haystacks and sheds on the Melton-Toolern Vale Road, before it was finally contained at Rockbank. Firefighters and residents alike were lucky to escape the flames, although there were several close calls. No lives were lost, but several people were treated at Bacchus Marsh Hospital for burns, and hundreds of animals were killed. When the fire engulfed Mary Tolhurst's house while she was inside, a bucket of water was thrown over her, putting out her scorched hair. Charles Jones 'lay down on the road for air to breathe as the flames and smoke passed over him'.<sup>50</sup>

The fire was utterly devastating, especially for Toolern Vale, which was almost completely destroyed. Only three houses in the small township were left standing.<sup>51</sup> Twenty-three children were evacuated from the Toolern Vale school just 15 minutes before the fire swept into the town at around 2 pm. Teacher Beryl Harrington (née Robinson) later recalled 'panic struck as we realised it was no small fire on a hot summer's day. Clouds of smoke filled the sky'.<sup>52</sup> The school was destroyed, along with 15 houses, the post office and general store, Mechanics' Institute hall, tennis pavilion and church.

Following the fire, the close-knit community turned their attention to rebuilding. Fundraisers, working bees, the skills of local builder Alan Reed and sheer community volunteer power made it possible for the new Toolern Vale hall to be erected within a matter of months.<sup>53</sup>

The front page of *The Express* newspaper, 18 March 1965.

Library Collection, Melton City Council

**W. J. HOGAN**  
Carrier  
Agent for:  
**MOBIL OIL**  
Royal Insurance Co.  
  
Bacchus Marsh  
Phone 2025

# The Express

**MELTON**

Official Organ of the Melton Shire Council.

**HOW TO ADVERTISE EVERY BUYER LOOKS FOR—**

- A factual description of the item offering for sale.
- Its price and terms of sale.
- Direct contact with vendor by name and address, phone number.

ADVERTISE IN "THE EXPRESS"  
Phone Bacchus Marsh 3017

No. 3134. Regd. at G.P.O., Melbourne, Vic. for transmission by post as a newspaper.

**THURSDAY, 18th MARCH, 1965**

P.O. Box 90 — Bacchus Marsh Telephone 2017

Price, 4d.

## TOOLERN FIRE WAS DEVASTATING: 13 HOMES BURNED

**THE MOST** destructive fire ever to attack the district left a 12-mile trail of desolation and heartbreak last Thursday afternoon, between Toolern Vale and Rockbank.

Three features of the fire were—

- Amazingly, no loss of life.
- Absence of forewarning.
- First thought of all was to save farm animals.

The hamlet of Toolern Vale was virtually wiped out. The school, hall, church (vicaried), P.O. store, municipal park and tennis pavilion were all destroyed, as well as four adjacent homes.

The brick Mechanic's Hall erected 1884, was well insured, so has a good chance of being rebuilt.

Originally Methodist, the brick and stone church served also Presbyterian worshippers for many years and, until about five years ago, C of E services were held in it. At the time of the fire it was a barn for horse hire.

The fire began 1 1/2 pm on Mr. Ian Hunt's farm at the foot of Breakneck, east of Cleburne Road.

Footscray Police have been investigating the cause of the outbreak.

Roads and ploughed fire-breaks proved of little value in front of the fierce northerly wind. Hundreds of men fought at various separate points with varying degrees of success, but the fire was not checked until it reached the main Melbourne-Ballarat railway line west of Rockbank station.

Water tanks and fire fighting trucks from all neighboring districts joined with local units in the fight, but the speed of the fire's spread, often in sections, defied co-ordinated effort.

It was confidently thought that the blaze could be met head-on and beaten at Melton-Kelso Road, but the fire jumped this barrier, likewise the Western Highway further on.

Scattered down to narrow tongue as it headed for the railway line, the fire died hard, taking out more houses in its death throes.

Had the fire crossed the road, taking out more houses in its death throes.

Had the fire crossed the railway it might have won its way to Werribee.

At the Western Highway the fire ran east and west along tree plantations for about a mile. Railway traffic had to detour, mainly via Elford and Passau.

**MELTON MISSED**

P.M.C.O. technicians at the automatic telephone shack which was on the western fringe of the fire on Colman Road almost lost a station when a wooden tankard was blown by blasting holes in a 1000-pai tank with his shotgun. The wooden tankard was ablaze and the water in the tank was boiling, but it sprayed out the fire man effectively.

P.M.C.O. technicians at the automatic telephone shack which was on the western fringe of the fire on Colman Road almost lost a station when a wooden tankard was blown by blasting holes in a 1000-pai tank with his shotgun. The wooden tankard was ablaze and the water in the tank was boiling, but it sprayed out the fire man effectively.

**LOOTERS**

Sightseers by the hundred drove their cars through the fire area at the western end. Some looting of hot water services being one of the popular items for thieves.

**WOMEN ON JOB**

A C.W.A. meeting at Melton Mechanic's Hall on Thursday turned into a catering depot while womenfolk throughout the district kept up supplies of tea and eatables. Melton Red Cross first aiders entered an all-night service in the hall. They also had relief clothing delivered in Melton from R.Q. by 11 pm.

**BELIEF WORK**

Accompanied by Mr. John Wilson, M.L.A., Mr. W. J. Mansel, M.L.A., Chairman of the Bunfire Relief Committee, visited the Toolern-Rockbank area on Friday and distributed application forms for emergency relief. The Shire Hall is the "nerve centre" for relief operations. The Shire Secretary (Mr. Danton) and his wife and willing staff have been concentrating on the emergency work.

A meeting of Shire Councillors was held on Friday night and next day all Civic Fathers were out helping bury dead sheep and otherwise rendering practical aid.

The Council sent letters of sympathy to the fire sufferers and offered all possible help.

**Shire Valuations Doubled**

REVALUATION of Bacchus Marsh Shire, just completed, has raised net annual values 93 per cent.

The revaluation includes unimproved capital values, which would enable the present 3 1/2 rate to be reduced to 1 8 in the £.

Official figures, showing comparisons and the classes of property differently affected, will be published next week.

**MELTON GUIDES**

A film night will be held at the Presbyterian Hall next Tuesday night showing highlights of the trip to New Zealand last January which was attended by our representatives, Devide Louisa Prosser and her family.

**PERSONAL**

Friends extend sympathy to Mr. George Miller, of "Pete", Bacchus Marsh, in the loss of his mother, whose death occurred last Sunday.

Mr. and Mrs. Pat Barry have moved from Bacchus Marsh to take over a road-house petrol station at Avenel.

**ENGAGEMENT**

**COWAN-IRVING**

Mr. and Mrs. D. G. Cowan, of Bacchus Marsh, have much pleasure in announcing the engagement of their eldest daughter, Lorraine Dawn, to John Wallace, only son of Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Irvine, of Colfield.

**SILVER WEDDING**

**PATMAN-YOUNG**

Congratulations, Mrs. and Dad, on the occasion of your Silver Wedding Anniversary on 21st March.

Love from Jim, Murray, Bev, and Doug, also grandchildren, Wayne, Michael and Shane.

**Appeal for Donations**

Melton Shire President (Mr. T. L. Barrie) on Tuesday launched a public appeal for funds to aid the victims of Thursday's fire.

Mr. Barrie said in launching the appeal, that the extent of the fire damage was still being evaluated. However, it was clearly apparent that many families had lost all their possessions and, in an endeavour to assist these people to re-establish themselves, he earnestly commended the appeal to all residents of the Shire.

Donations will be received at the Shire Office, Melton.

**MEETINGS**

A meeting of all folk who suffered loss by Thursday's fire will be held in Melton on Friday evening.

**MELTON PHARMACY FOR FILMS**

PHONE 164

**L. JONGEBLOED MELTON SCREENINGS SUPPLIED**

PHONE MELTON 102

**BACKHOUSE BROS. BUTCHERS**

(L. E. and M. R. Backhouse)

**SHIRE OF MELTON**

A MEETING will be held in the Council Chamber on FRIDAY, 19th March, at 8 p.m. of all persons affected by the bushfire on 11th inst.

T. L. BARRIE, Shire President.

**MELTON DISTRICT TENNIS ASSN.**

END-OF-SEASON DANCE, FRIDAY, 21st May, in Melton Mechanic's Hall, Hogan's Cinema.

**MELTON GUIDES**

A FILM NIGHT will be held in the Presbyterian Hall on TUESDAY, 23rd March, at 8 p.m.—Excursion Trip to New Zealand's Dominion Supper. O.H.F. Table.

**MELTON PHARMACY FOR FILMS**

PHONE 164

**L. JONGEBLOED MELTON SCREENINGS SUPPLIED**

PHONE MELTON 102

**BACKHOUSE BROS. BUTCHERS**

(L. E. and M. R. Backhouse)

121

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM  
TOP LEFT

**The local Country Women's Association float at the 1962 shire centenary celebrations.**

Melton & District Historical Society

**The Red Cross float at the 1962 shire centenary celebrations.**

Melton & District Historical Society

**Dancers celebrating the shire's centenary, 1962.**

Melton & District Historical Society

**Shire centenary celebrations in 1962.**

Melton & District Historical Society

## **A growing community**

Unlike many other areas of metropolitan Melbourne, Melton did not see the huge waves of post-war European immigrants that many of the inner-city suburbs and areas did. However, there were a number of migrants from the United Kingdom that chose to call the shire home. Mrs Manson migrated with her family from Scotland. She told a local newspaper in 1965 that they found Melton to be:

... wonderful, really a good place to live. The people here are very friendly and have made us and other new residents feel very welcome ... although we have all the amenities we need, there is still the lovely country atmosphere and freedom for the children – they love it here.<sup>54</sup>

One British airman who visited Melton during the war liked it so much that he decided to migrate after the war ended. But when Fred Ogden struggled to obtain passage to Australia for his family via conventional means, he flew himself, his wife and daughter across the world in their own plane in 1946. The family landed in their new home after 67 days of travel.<sup>55</sup>

English immigrant Irene Richards and her family arrived in Australia in 1965 as 'Ten Pound Poms', part of the Assisted Passage Migration Scheme instituted by the Australian government after World War II.<sup>56</sup> With a young daughter, as well as Irene's mother and step-father, it was imperative that the family find a large home, quickly. They discovered Melton while taking weekend drives from where they were staying in Moonee Ponds out to the surrounding rural areas. Irene and her parents both bought residential blocks of land in Melton to build on. She remembers 'a lot of immigrants bought land in the township in both north and south Melton'. Moving there was a big change for Irene and her family: 'Coming from London ... from having all sorts of amenities around, moving to a place where there were few was a real shock and took a lot of adjusting'. It was:

A rather scrubby place with a couple of pubs – Mac's and the Golden Fleece, Joengblod's hardware store, a pharmacy, a general store, butcher, Tuckerbag supermarket, post office, petrol station, estate agent, the Mechanics Institute, a church, primary school, an occasional bank and hitching posts – just like a wild west town.<sup>57</sup>





1940-1980



Mary Dodemaide (née Carl) recalls development in Melton's High Street starting to take off around the time that she opened a hairdressing shop in High Street at the age of twenty-one in the late 1960s. Her shop was one of three new buildings built in High Street at the one time. One was a post office, and the third a haberdashery.<sup>58</sup> By the early 1970s, Australia had a population of 13 million people and had been growing steadily at a rate of around two per cent per year since World War II.<sup>59</sup> The post-war era was one of progress and prosperity, with the expansion of motor car ownership, roadways and suburbs. Growth was the name of the game.

The Shire of Melton and its rural community had maintained a fairly stable population from the late nineteenth century up until the mid-1950s, hovering somewhere between 1,000 and 1,500 people.<sup>60</sup> By 1962, however, the population rose to 1,800 and just six years later doubled to 3,600.<sup>61</sup> April 1969 saw the first major residential development in Melton, Westmelton Satellite City. This was the first estate built in a modern style, with curved streets, culs de sac and underground electricity and telephone connections. Described as 'a preview of tomorrow', the Westmelton estate was indicative of the type of residential development the shire was about to see much more of.<sup>62</sup> Bernard Coburn was born in Melton in 1938 and lived in the shire for fifty years. He remembers one enterprising estate agent in the 1960s taking a bus to the migrant hostels in Melbourne and bringing back interested people to view the newly developed residential estates in Melton.<sup>63</sup> However, the Shire of Melton was only just beginning to contend with the consequences that came with this rapid growth.

As newcomers arrived, the need for infrastructure to support the shire's booming population became more pronounced. Irene Richards found the scarcity of amenities and resources in Melton when she arrived in 1965 to be a real shock. In describing her house Irene recalls: 'At least we had piped metered water (of a pale brown colour) and electricity and a septic tank to deal with sewerage. Many houses had huge rainwater tanks attached'.<sup>64</sup>

Alan Perry and his wife moved to Melton South from West Footscray shortly after they got married in 1970. Alan recalls hearing that Melton was cheap in comparison with the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, although he always wanted to stay in the west. Back then, Melton was:

Very different. There weren't too many houses ... and we didn't get mail or anything like that. We got our mail dropped off at another house on the street, because the posties back then would only deliver to streets where there were more than two houses.<sup>65</sup>



Charlie Zerafa was ten years old when his family moved to a seven-acre farm on Brooklyn Road, Melton South in 1974. Like Alan, Charlie's family had to collect their mail from the local post office. With no electricity or mains water, Charlie remembers 'it was an adventure living there'.<sup>66</sup> Arriving at their new home, Charlie described the rural setting:

The old dusty pink house stood lonely and wet amongst the gum trees, and the grass around it was long and messy. The closest property was the dairy to the east of the farm over a kilometre away. To the North, West and South there were no houses at all. This house may as well have been a million miles from anywhere.<sup>67</sup>

Irene Richards soon found herself at the forefront of planning for these basic amenities for Meltonians, when she became a shire councillor in 1969. Water and sewerage, as well as education facilities, transportation and infrastructure, were fundamental issues for the shire as it found itself growing with new residents daily.

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### **Paving the way**

After migrating to Australia from England in 1965, and settling in the rapidly growing township of Melton, in 1969 Irene Richards became the first woman to be elected to the Melton Shire Council. For almost one hundred years, the council had been made up entirely of men. Irene made history again in 1975, when she became the first female Shire President of Melton. She recalls:

My election to this post was not received with total acceptance. I was a 'woman', only one in a council of twelve, and I had leftish views about governance, although I had always stood as an independent. However, I managed the couple of unruly farmers who came to respect my honesty and diligence in the post I held ...<sup>68</sup>

Irene enthusiastically took on the challenge of paving the way for other women to join the local council. She insisted her full name was printed on the Shire President Honour Board, rather than her initials, 'so they could see it was a woman!' In 2018, almost fifty years after Irene was first elected, the majority of councillors serving on the Melton City Council are women.<sup>69</sup>

**OPPOSITE, TOP TO BOTTOM**  
**Posing next to the Melton population sign in 1973.**

Photographed by Charles Gruer.  
Melton & District Historical Society, 1919

**Ida Porter was post mistress at the Melton Post Office from 1966 to 1978.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 531

**BELOW**  
**Irene Richards became the first woman to be elected to the Melton Shire Council in 1969, and the first female Shire President in 1975.**

Melton City Council







**ABOVE**  
**Melton Football Club**  
**premiers, 1963.**

Melton Football Netball Club

**RIGHT & OPPOSITE**  
**Shire centenary celebrations**  
**in 1962.**

Melton & District Historical Society

As well as putting pressure on basic services and amenities, the influx of new residents to the shire also highlighted the need for more social and recreational facilities. It was not enough to just provide the basic requirements for survival, the shire's citizens were seeking a particular lifestyle. In the 1960s when the shire was experiencing such development and change, Melva Hirt remembers the community coming together to establish a netball and basketball court, as well as much-needed facilities like an ambulance and medical services. Events, such as bottle drives, helped to raise the necessary funds, and there was a real sense of 'generosity and community spirit'.<sup>70</sup> Maureen Jongebloed moved to Melton in 1953. Like Melva, she too has many positive memories of the community spirit in the early days of Melton's rapid development during the 1960s. The community banded together to fix up the neglected tennis courts. Many local community groups were run entirely by volunteers. In the case of the Melton Football Club, community members washed jumpers, and players mowed the grass and painted the lines on the ground before each game.<sup>71</sup>





1940-1980

# Bullen's African Lion Safari



**Bullen's Circus elephant  
Jumbo with Jean Carroll,  
1954.**

Photographer Les Gorrie, Argus Newspaper  
Collection of Photographs. State Library  
Victoria, H2004.100/1152

Few people who drove through the Shire of Melton during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s could have missed the zebra-striped toilet blocks along the Western Highway at Rockbank, featuring a sign proclaiming 'African Lion Safari'. It was a curious relic, left over from a few short years when Rockbank was home to some very peculiar creatures.

Bullen's African Lion Safari opened in Rockbank in the early 1970s. Visitors were encouraged to drive through the open range safari park in their own cars, to view the lions, camels, bears and an elephant that roamed around the property. While establishing a private safari park in the rapidly developing satellite city of Melton might seem like a dangerous game, the Bullen family who ran the park were no novices when it came to exotic animals.

Alfred Percival Bullen and Lilian Ethel Bullen, known as 'Tiger Lil', established a family circus in the 1920s. During the 1930s, Bullen Bros Circus toured Queensland with a show that included a brass band and menagerie of dogs, monkeys, horses and big cats. During the post-war era, the Bullen name became associated with one of the most exciting circuses in Australia, which included a cast of thirteen elephants, four lions, two tigers, two leopards and two bears, as well as the family's children: Stafford, Kenneth, Gregory, Mavis and Jules. By the mid-twentieth century, Bullen's Circus had 26 standout acts, 56 vehicles and caravans and a staff of 80 people.<sup>72</sup> Despite the success of earlier years, the advent of television signalled the end of an era for entertainment like travelling circuses. On 25 May 1969, Bullen's Circus gave its final performance in Parramatta.

But the Bullen family were not ready to give up their exotic lifestyle. Alfred and Lilian's sons established lion safari parks in Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria.<sup>73</sup> Gregory Bullen chose Rockbank as the location for his safari park.

Bullen's African Lion Safari had a short, but colourful career in Rockbank. Many locals recall



the thrill of living so close to wild animals. One resident remembers hearing 'the roars of lions many nights' as a child, while another recalls travelling through the park on a bus, terrified 'because the lions were pushing through the doors'.<sup>74</sup> Things turned serious on a few occasions when animals attacked visitors to the park. In 1977, a man who had opened his car windows to take a better photo of a bear received a nasty shock when the bear stuck its head through the window and bit his shoulder. While the Bullen family later said that this incident was the first time they had experienced any trouble with the bears, he added, 'It's lucky my men were on the spot otherwise the bear would have dragged the man from the car and killed him'.<sup>75</sup>

In 1979, train travellers were stunned to discover their journey was interrupted because of an elephant on the tracks. Sue the elephant escaped her enclosure and wandered along the railway line, disrupting passengers travelling on the Ballarat train. Sue was eventually coaxed back to Bullen's park with some food. Wayne Bullen revealed to reporters that this was in fact the second time Sue had made an escape: 'Last time she went the other way and we eventually rounded her up after she crossed the Western Highway'.<sup>76</sup>

Surprisingly, Bullen's African Lion Park in Rockbank was not the only open-air safari to operate in the district. Another famous circus family, the Ashtons, established another in Bacchus Marsh around the same time as Bullen's.<sup>77</sup>

Bullen's African Lion Park closed down in 1982. The lions and bears were transferred to Bullen's Sydney safari park, but the other animals, including camels, emus, donkeys, deer, buffalo, goats, pigs and kangaroos, were auctioned off to the highest bidders.<sup>78</sup> In 1988, the park was purchased by new owners who turned it into a plant nursery. The safari park's kiosk and toilet blocks, as well as some of the animal cages, remained on the site for many more years, rousing the imaginations of curious children as they drove past on the Western Highway.<sup>79</sup>

### **The deprived west**

The election of a national Labor government in 1972 for the first time in 23 years was the impetus for some significant changes in Australian society, including the introduction of free health care, free tertiary education, the dismantling of the White Australia immigration policy and the beginnings of the recognition of Aboriginal Land Rights. It was a time for action, with the women's liberation movement, the fight for equal rights and the formation of the world's first 'Green' party in Tasmania, which campaigned for environmental protection and preservation. Australians also saw significant technological advances during this time, with the introduction of colour television and the first wave of small business computers.<sup>80</sup>

In the Shire of Melton, residents were becoming restless and many felt they were not being accurately represented on the shire council. Prior to 1969, the council was made up of nine representatives and the shire was divided into three ridings, or administrative divisions. Each of these ridings represented a different area of the shire. The Melton Residents Association felt that this division no longer evenly represented the residents, since the township by this time had grown substantially. With the majority of the population residing in the centre of Melton, the population was not evenly spread across the three ridings. The association campaigned for a fourth riding and was successful in establishing Toolern Vale as the new riding. The council was restructured, with the election of an additional three councillors bringing the total to twelve. Irene Richards made history, becoming the first woman to be elected to the Shire of Melton council in 1969.<sup>81</sup>

At the same time, some members of the state government were concerned with the uneven spread of growth across the Melbourne metropolis. They pushed for studies to be conducted into transport, water and power in developing areas of the metropolis.<sup>82</sup> In a statement made by Minister for Local Government Rupert Hamer in February 1968, he stated:

Many have remarked on the lopsided pattern of growth of the Metropolis over the past three decades, but the Government believes the balance may be restored ... the Metropolitan Planning Authority will be asked to study the practicability of establishing satellite towns in the areas of Melton, Sunbury and Whittlesea.<sup>83</sup>

In a report published in September 1974 by the Town and Country Planning Board, the board

confirmed this approach to westward development, noting that it was 'becoming more and more apparent that Melbourne's predominately eastward and south eastward expansion is a luxury that can no longer be afforded'.<sup>84</sup>

Concerns about the disproportional development of the metropolis towards the east, and the disadvantages this was causing people living in the west, led to the emergence of the phrase, 'the deprived west'. Melbourne's west, including both inner and outer city centres like Footscray, Werribee, Melton, Altona and Williamstown, was home to around 300,000 people in 1966. It was a mostly young population, with 40 per cent of residents under the age of 20. There was a noticeable lack of professional, managerial and administration workers living in the west and, compared with their eastern counterparts, residents in the west had less access to doctors, dentists and education. The 1966 census revealed that the whole of the western suburbs had 100 resident doctors and dentists, while the suburb of Camberwell in Melbourne's east had 422 doctors. On average, one of every seven children born in the eastern suburbs went to university, and just one of every 22 children born in the west.<sup>85</sup>

In their campaign flyer for the 1969 election, prospective councillors for the new Toolern Vale riding, Eddie Gillespie, George Howat and Jeff Robinson, campaigned on issues including roads and bridges; streets and drainage; the 'extension of as many services as possible to all areas'; water schemes for Toolern Vale, Diggers Rest and Rockbank; transport; education; recreational facilities and a swimming pool.<sup>86</sup> It was evident that the rapidly growing shire needed a lot of basic infrastructural upgrades, as well as new developments in water, waste, roads, education and other services, in order to adequately serve the rapidly expanding population.

In May 1972, five hundred people attended a seminar organised by the Sunshine Lions Club called 'The Deprived West'. The seminar included presentations on health care, education and preschools in the west. Melton Shire President Alfred Missen presented a paper about the shire, addressing the problems it faced in becoming a true satellite city. Unlike a typical suburb, a satellite city is designed to have its own city centre, making it independent of, but still close to, a larger metropolis. Councillor Missen addressed questions around transport, industry, education and residential development, and outlined where support was needed to achieve the necessary requirements to become a satellite city.<sup>87</sup> It was reported at the seminar that the industrial output of the western suburbs for the year 1967 to 1968 was \$846 million, the highest for the Melbourne region. But the value of new houses and flats for that same period was the lowest in the region.<sup>88</sup>



At another seminar in 1972, on industry, transport and employment in the west, Bob Hawke as president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions argued the development of industry in the west had occurred with little regard for the environment or the economic and social needs of the people living there.<sup>89</sup>

In 1973, the Western Region Commission was formed in an effort to help redress some of the imbalance in municipalities in Melbourne's west.<sup>90</sup> By this time, the population of the Shire of Melton had increased from 2,500 in 1966, to 9,500 by 1973, making it the fastest growing municipality in the state.<sup>91</sup> The shire council was dealing with a number of issues that were becoming increasingly more critical to the future success of Melton as a satellite city. Fortunately, as a member of the Western Regional Commission, the Shire of Melton benefited from federal funding grants. In April 1974, the shires of Sunbury, Gisborne, Macedon, Riddell, Bacchus Marsh, Melton, Woodend, Lancefield, Romsey and Craigieburn received \$416,298 worth of federal grants. The Melton Shire was allocated funds from this to purchase a much-needed building for the Melton Welfare Resource Centre. The centre, supported by the Melton Community Services Group, was to house community welfare services, including a community development officer, social worker, youth worker, adult education centre and family day care, among other services.<sup>92</sup>

### **Waterworks**

A sewerage treatment facility was top priority for the new council, as the shire was still dependent on septic tanks. In 1969 the Melton Sewerage Authority was constituted. As its chair, Irene Richards 'had the honour of turning the first sod outside the shire offices'.<sup>93</sup> The Melton Sewerage Authority remained operational until 1983, when it was taken over by the Shire of Melton Water Board.<sup>94</sup> The Melton sewerage system took many years to plan and construct, and was finally fully completed in 1988.<sup>95</sup>

Water continued as a critical issue for the developing city. During the early 1970s it was decided that the gravity feed from the Djerrivarrh Dam was insufficient for the predicted population growth. By 1972, the construction of Lake Merrimu was underway, designed to supplement the dam. In addition, a water treatment plant was established for further clarification of the treated water and, in light of successful results in Bacchus Marsh, fluoride was added to the water supply.<sup>96</sup>

A central figure in the development of these large-scale public services was shire engineer Tony Carberry. Irene Richards, who was a councillor at the time, remembers him as key to the development and planning of Melton during this era: 'His foresight and imagination laid the foundations of Melton as it is now'.<sup>97</sup> Another project overseen by Tony, was the construction of an Olympic-sized swimming pool. The outdoor pool cost \$240,000 to build, and was a huge endeavour for the community. Irene Richards recalls 'it took a lot of courage for such a venture' and represented 'a huge sum for such a small place'.<sup>98</sup> Local groups and organisations, including the developer of Westmelton and the Melton Amateur Theatrical Society, donated money towards the pool's construction.<sup>99</sup> By the time it was completed, the pool had become a major selling point for the new Westmelton development. The Estate's newsletter enthused:

Imagine the blue skies and hot sun, and the weekends you can invite your friends down from the city and take them to spend the day sunbaking and swimming in a glistening ultramodern Olympic-size pool, then back home for a barbecue and liquid refreshments in the relaxed, outdoor living atmosphere of your modern Westmelton home.<sup>100</sup>



**Melton's Olympic-sized swimming pool opened in 1971.**

Melton & District Historical Society

1940-1980

# Westmelton Satellite City

In April 1969, the first major residential development in Melton began with the release of 148 homes for purchase. This was the first stage of a staggered release of a planned 30,000 homes for 100,000 people by 1990. The development, called Westmelton Satellite City, was described as 'a preview of tomorrow'.<sup>101</sup> It was the first estate built in a 'modern' style, with curved streets, and dozens of culs de sac.<sup>102</sup> Westmelton was also the first major development in Victoria to build all the supply lines to the houses – including electricity and telephone lines – underground. The six different home designs in Westmelton were 'specially designed for the future', and with allotments ten feet wider than regulations required, there was plenty of 'space for gracious living' and for a family swimming pool.<sup>103</sup>

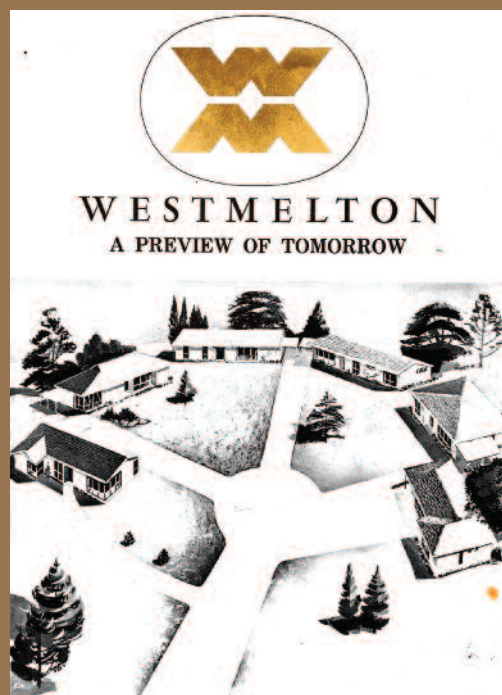
The developers of this new estate were active in promoting Westmelton as a new community within the Shire of Melton. By 1971, the *Westmelton City News* reported that Ian McIntosh, General Manager of Westmelton, had given away \$100,000 on behalf of the company 'to aid community projects'. This included a \$72,000 donation towards building a community centre in Westmelton, and \$25,000 for the shire's Olympic-sized swimming pool. Ian McIntosh and his family moved to Melton and Ian said he was 'very much aware of the needs of [the] Westmelton community'.<sup>104</sup>

By the end of 1971, Westmelton was home to 100 new families. The modern residences were obviously an appealing drawcard, but so was the country feel that characterised Melton. Mrs C. Allen, described as a 'housewife', said she and her husband chose to move to Westmelton because of 'the quality homes ... and we both love the clean, fresh, natural environment that surrounds us'. Similarly, Mr W. Coxhead, insurance consultant, moved to Westmelton because of the 'clean, fresh country air'. Accountant Mr B. Swanton echoed their sentiments, describing Westmelton as 'far enough away from the industrial pollution carried over Melbourne suburbs



by prevailing westerly winds'.<sup>105</sup> The new development attracted an increasing number of young, professional couples and families, representing the beginning of a significant shift from the predominantly rural and farming community of the district's past.

The Westmelton development had four different 'neighbourhoods' designed to cater to a variety of different lifestyle needs. Westmelton was the first to be established, followed by Brookfield, which offered 'superb land in a rustic setting'. Brookfield Acres offered 'wide open spaces with lots of room for a pool and even a tennis court' on huge one-acre blocks, while Westlake was an innovative development with 'different sized homesites' and 'lakeside living'.<sup>106</sup> Westmelton was the first of many residential developments that would come to play a huge role in shaping the shire in the decades to follow.



**A marketing brochure for the Westmelton Satellite City development, entitled 'A Preview of Tomorrow'.**

Library Collection, Melton City Council



The MMBW was also opposed to the development of a large industrial garden estate on the eastern side of the shire. 'Industrial expansion', wrote the shire secretary, 'is regarded as essential to the balanced development of this fast growing 'satellite' of metropolitan Melbourne'.<sup>109</sup> As a result of the MMBW's refusal, the shire council, under its own authority as a planning body, rezoned close to 900 acres of rural land for industrial purpose.<sup>110</sup> The industrial area, east of the town and adjacent to Toolern Creek, was to 'be developed in a park like setting'.<sup>111</sup> In 1982, the *Bacchus Marsh Express* reported on the official opening of the Melton Unit Factories by the State Minister for Conservation and Planning, Evan Walker.<sup>112</sup> The estate included nine new factories and provided up to 25 jobs. Minister Walker said the government was 'committed to making sure' the Shire of Melton had 'the support it needs to help itself prosper'. The state government also set up a working group to investigate ways of encouraging more businesses and industries to move to the Shire of Melton. The Shire President at the time, Malcolm Peacock, was hopeful that the council's approved purchase of additional land adjacent to the factories would mean a second stage development of more industrial workspaces would soon begin.<sup>113</sup>

As well as looking to develop and encourage further employment opportunities within the shire, with almost 50 per cent of the population of the shire under the age of 20, the need for more educational facilities became increasingly more critical as the population continued to rise.<sup>114</sup> In just ten years, four new primary schools opened: Melton West (1971), Coburn Primary (1975), St Dominic's (1976) and St Anthony's (1978).<sup>115</sup> When Melton West Primary School opened its doors for the first time in August 1971, 240 'happy and excited' students filled 'the bright, modern classrooms', reported the *Westmelton City News*.<sup>116</sup> The school was originally designed as a building of six classrooms, but halfway through construction the principal Alex Slocombe realised that this would not provide enough space, so the Department of Education extended the plans to include four more classrooms, a library and general-purpose room. The principal anticipated that the school would reach its 360-student capacity in just twelve months.<sup>117</sup>

While primary school coverage was considered 'adequate' for the shire by the 1970s, there was a distinct lack of further education options for students in the Shire of Melton, with no secondary schools, technical schools or universities.<sup>118</sup> In 1947, a bus started running between Melton and the Bacchus Marsh Higher Elementary School (now Bacchus Marsh Secondary College), saving young people in Melton the long trip to metropolitan secondary schools and making it much easier for them to continue their education.<sup>119</sup> Wendy Barrie remembers all the





passengers having to get off the bus at Exford to walk across an old, wooden bridge, so the empty bus could be driven over it safely.<sup>120</sup> Melva Hirt recalls travelling by train to Sunshine Technical School in the late 1950s and early 1960s. At the time, the train would stop only when hailed.<sup>121</sup> By the 1970s, high school students still needed to travel to Bacchus Marsh to finish their education, and those who wished to attend a technical college had to go to Sunshine.<sup>122</sup>

In 1975, Melton High School opened its doors and for the first time in the history of the district, students had the option of continuing their education close to home. It took another four years, but in 1979 Melton Technical School opened, meaning students like Melva Hirt no longer had to catch the train to Sunshine to pursue further study.<sup>123</sup> Although shire councillors began talking about the benefits of establishing a university in Melton in 1971, local students would have to wait another sixteen years before tertiary education came to the shire.<sup>124</sup>

### The Big M debate

In 1977, the iconic flavoured milk drink, Big M, hit the shelves in Victoria.<sup>125</sup> From the beginning, the manufacturers wanted to sell a dairy product that could compete with the popularity of soft drinks. Early advertisements included bikini-clad women on the beach suggestively drinking Big Ms in the summer heat. Summer and Big M have continued to go hand in hand, with just about every advertisement linking Big M with the beach, swimming and fun. Impressively, Big M has been able to compete with soft drinks like Coca-Cola and has remained a Victorian favourite for the past four decades.<sup>126</sup>

Big M is currently owned by drinks manufacturer Lion. When it was first marketed, Big M was a product of the Victorian Dairy Industry Authority (VDIA). Established in 1977 to replace the former Victorian Milk Board, the VDIA was responsible for ensuring a sufficient supply of milk and dairy products for all Victorian markets, and making sure that all Victorian dairy farmers profited fairly.<sup>127</sup> The idea of Big M flavoured milk came about as part of a marketing and promotional campaign by the VDIA to encourage increased consumption of flavoured milk. The new campaign managed to increase flavoured milk sales by 16 per cent in just one year.<sup>128</sup>

The popularity of Big M has continued throughout the years. Each of the flavours has its own champions and the decision to change the recipe for the chocolate Big M in 2014 resulted in immediate backlash and protest from consumers.<sup>129</sup>



OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

**Students from Coburn Primary School using new bike lanes, 1980.**

Melton & District Historical Society

**Melton West Primary School students.**

Melton & District Historical Society

**Minister of Education Robert Fordham with students at the Melton Technical School, which opened in 1979.**

Melton & District Historical Society

**Students at St Anthony's Primary School, 1979.**

Melton & District Historical Society

**OPPOSITE**

**An aerial view over Melton in 1970, looking towards the east.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 1609

But what does the 'M' in Big M actually stand for? Some have suggested 'milk' but it is popularly considered to be a reference to its place of origin: Melton or Mordialloc. Ongoing debate between the people of Melton and those in Mordialloc reflects the desire of each to claim the famous drink as their own. While no definitive history of the popular milk drink exists, the current manufacturers of Big M confirm that: 'the M in Big M stands for Melton'.<sup>130</sup>

### **A satellite city**

In March 1974, the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works released a report that nominated Melton for development as a satellite city.<sup>131</sup> In December, a report from the Minister for Planning reaffirmed the selection of Melton and Sunbury as locations for satellite townships, 'separate from but having strong links with, the metropolitan area'. The selection of two areas for satellite townships was deliberately chosen:

The objective in each case will be moderately accelerated development at a rate which can readily be absorbed by each township without engulfing it, without destruction of its special charm and character or its people's sense of identity.<sup>132</sup>

By the end of 1974 Melton was proudly advertising itself as 'Victoria's First Satellite City'.<sup>133</sup> The challenges of becoming a true satellite city, however, were many. Following an investigation into the Melton and Sunbury areas, the Town and Country Planning Board reported:

The satellite cities should be attractive to a full range of Melbourne's people, and be comprehensively planned; they should offer a wide range of job opportunities with a view to reducing the need for commuting; and they will require novel and energetic development techniques using enlightened and determined Government action in partnership with effective private initiatives.<sup>134</sup>

The Hamer state government certainly showed determined action in the promise of \$12.5 million for the development of Melton and Sunbury into satellite cities. This promise was upheld by the Cain government when it came to power in 1982.<sup>135</sup>





1940-1980

The 1974 report of the Town and Country Planning Board also commented that rapid growth in the area '... has imposed demands on the already limited resources available to the two small communities. At the same time people have increasing expectations of a continually improving quality of life'.<sup>136</sup>

As a result, municipal governments were faced with two problems: rapid population growth and the strain that this placed on resources, coupled with the demand from that growing population for ever-improving infrastructure and facilities. The challenge of becoming a satellite city was not lost on the Town and Country Planning Board. It proposed 'that planning and management of Melton and Sunbury be placed under a single authority'.<sup>137</sup>

Accordingly, the Melton Sunbury Interim Coordinating Committee was established in January 1975.<sup>138</sup> The following year, it released a document that contained three reports prepared by consultants on areas pertinent to the development of the satellite cities; public involvement and social planning; population, employment and housing; and physical planning. The consultants saw it as an exciting prospect; a 'concept new to urban development in Victoria' and an



**The Melton shopping strip,  
1979.**

Melton & District Historical Society

'opportunity to introduce new and imaginative programmes unlikely to be attainable in already developed areas'.<sup>139</sup>

There was some concern that the satellite city model, which had been successful in the United Kingdom, would not work for Australian society. Malcolm Peacock, who was a councillor at the time, remembers the Melton Sunbury Committee trying to emulate the structure of the British satellite towns. The Australian situation, however, was completely different.<sup>140</sup>

Planners wished to maintain a green or rural 'wedge' between Melton and the city of Melbourne, creating the 'satellite' effect of the satellite city – separate, but close to the metropolis. However, Shire President Alfred Missen was dismayed to discover that planning officers assumed one area of the shire was the same as another. The 100 acres of rural land selected for the rural wedge on the western fringes of Melbourne had very few economically viable options for rural development. This was because, compared with other areas of the shire, this selection had very low rainfall, severely limiting the agricultural opportunities. In describing the unsuitability of this selection, Alfred Missen wrote:

... the most likely operations which could be economically successful would be pig raising and poultry farming. Because of the prevailing winds it is difficult to see the residents of urban areas being very happy if these offensive types of productions were allowed to become widespread.<sup>141</sup>

In his same address, Councillor Missen also noted that cereal farming, one of the district's biggest industries in the early twentieth century, required a minimum of 1000 acres. By the early 1970s, the average rural holding was just 400 acres. Due to rising land values, it became 'impossible ... to achieve the necessary expansion of acreage' required for this agricultural practice.<sup>142</sup>

It seemed that in working to create a satellite city that met the needs of the rapidly growing population, the Shire of Melton was in danger of losing its 'special charm and character' – the rural identity that many of its community members knew and loved.<sup>143</sup> Was it possible to create a proper satellite city, with all the advantages of the metropolitan lifestyle, but also maintain the country feel of old Melton? As the shire approached its fifth year as a satellite city, it was on the cusp of a collision between the future and the past.







CHAPTER 6

# A City for the Future

1980–2018



*Melton: the town with the greatest potential residentially, commercially and industrially west of Melbourne. The town GROWING UP.*

Melton Real Estate Agency<sup>1</sup>

1980–2018

1 THE LAND  
Dreamtime to 1835

2 DIVERGENT STORIES  
1835 to 1850

3 A COMMUNITY EMERGES  
1850 to 1900  
Population in 1865: 1,000

4 TRANSFORMATIONS  
1900 to 1940  
Population in 1919: 1,700

5 OPEN FOR PROGRESS  
1940 to 1980  
Population in 1973: 9,500

6 A CITY FOR THE FUTURE  
1980 to 2018  
Population in 2016: 135,443

# A

AS A NEW DECADE DAWNED, the Shire of Melton was swept up in the forward-looking satellite city development. The population in 1980 was 20,100 – a huge increase from the population of 1,803 recorded just two decades earlier.<sup>2</sup> As well as pushing residential, commercial and industrial development for the shire, urban planners and the shire council were focusing on developing more ‘human services’, including recreation facilities, schools, health care centres and parklands. The council and community members alike were keen on beautification, now that much of the major infrastructure needs of the community were being addressed. From 1976, the council offered both new homeowners and rural landholders native trees or shrubs to plant around their properties under a ‘Make Melton More Beautiful’ initiative.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the council continuing to promote the shire as offering city living with a country feel, the agricultural and rural roots of Melton were fast fading from everyday life. In 1981, the Shire of Melton, in collaboration with the *Melton Mail* newspaper, held a contest to choose a new slogan for the shire. Over three hundred entries were submitted and it was new Westmelton residents Chas and Linda Wood who came up with the winning entry: ‘Melton – the good move’. After winning the \$100 prize, Chas Wood commented:

We like the country feeling about Melton, and being so close to the city, we believe it offers the best of both worlds ... the main reason I entered the contest, I wanted to make some kind of contribution that will help improve Melton.<sup>4</sup>

The official shire crest containing pictorial elements of Melton’s unique rural character – a wheat sheaf, cow, sheep and hills – was changed to a logo proclaiming ‘Melton – the good move’ and shortly afterwards, ‘Melton – the good life’.<sup>5</sup> The same year that the new slogan was chosen,

#### PREVIOUS PAGES

**The view over Toolern Business Park, 1999.**

Melton City Council

**Welcome to Melton: Rosemarie, Reg and Yvonne Edwards arrive in 1982.**

Library Collection, Melton City Council

#### OPPOSITE

**With residential, industrial and commercial development booming, the population of the Shire of Melton grew to over 20,000 by 1980.**

Melton & District Historical Society



the Shire of Melton received \$1.25 million from the state government to assist with economic development. The money was allocated to projects including improving bus services, an information and promotion program, construction and development of the Melton Town Park, and road improvements, such as bicycle infrastructure, parking areas and improvements to the Western Highway service roads.<sup>6</sup>

In 1982, Minister for Planning Lou Liberman wrote in a promotional brochure produced by the Melton Promotion and Development Group that 'the Government has faith in Melton's future as a pleasant residential centre complemented by industrial and commercial development'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, residential development was well underway with increasing numbers of building permits for new houses issued each year.<sup>8</sup> House and land prices in the area were promoted as the 'most realistic' in Victoria. Residents could start a new life in the shire with 'space to spare'.<sup>9</sup> There were incentives on offer to increase industrial development in the area too, with rebates offered to those who took up residence in the new Melton Industrial Park or purchased land in the shire for the purpose.<sup>10</sup> Commercial development was also well underway. The first shopping arcade



1980-2018



**Local real estate agents at the Melton Industrial Park. Rebates were offered to those who established business operations there, to encourage industrial development in the shire.**

Melton & District Historical Society

opened in Melton on the south side of High Street, adjacent to Jongebloed's hardware store, in 1973.<sup>11</sup> By 1982 a new entertainment complex on the corner of McKenzie and Alexandra streets was almost complete.<sup>12</sup>

Sport continued to play an important role in the shire. By the early 1980s Melton boasted a reputation as a major sporting hub, with an array of recreational facilities, including football and hockey fields, netball courts and a swimming pool. The Melton Indoor Recreation Centre was completed in May 1979 and officially opened in July that year. It proved a boon for Melton High School, as well as the local community, offering a place to play all kinds of indoor sports. The centre also saw the establishment of regular competition leagues.<sup>13</sup> By 1983, the centre was used by an average of 4,000 residents each week.<sup>14</sup>

February 1982 saw the much-anticipated opening of the Melton Club. Shire President Malcolm Peacock performed the 'official handing over' of the new club building to club president Noel Bretherton, congratulating the hard-working community members who helped make the idea a reality.<sup>15</sup> The vision for the club first developed in 1977, with the aim to create 'a social and recreational outlet for Melton families'.<sup>16</sup> By 1979 the Melton Club Co-operative was registered with the Community Advancement Society. With a combination of funding from the Shire of Melton and money raised by the club members themselves, a dedicated building was constructed. Malcolm Peacock described the achievement as 'a tribute to the highest civic endeavour and an excellent example of the progress that can be made when people are prepared to help themselves'.<sup>17</sup>

Although these first clubrooms were not much more than a tin shed, they included a bowling green for members to play lawn bowls, which was the only major sport not catered for in Melton at that time.<sup>18</sup> Just ten years later, the Melton Club underwent a \$3.5 million renovation, transforming into a large, modern building and one of the centres of social life in the town.<sup>19</sup>

# The Heart of Thoroughbred Country

Melton has a long and celebrated history of horse breeding and racing. Draught horses were a crucial aspect of life in the early days of European settlement, and were heavily depended upon for both transport and agricultural labour. Peppercorn trees at the corner of Station and Brooklyn roads have been associated with a horse trough installed there to provide a drink to workhorses carting produce to the chaff mills and railway station south of Melton.<sup>20</sup> Breeders, trainers and harness drivers in the area later became such an influential force in the equine industry that this came to be a defining aspect of the district's identity and reputation.

Pioneer of the Victorian horse racing industry and early Rockbank squatter William Cross Yuille was one of the earliest importers of stud racehorses in the district in the 1850s. A leading sports editor and writer, Yuille established bloodstock auctioning agency W. C. Yuille & Co. and was involved in the compilation of the first Australian Stud Book, which ensures the integrity of thoroughbred breeding in Australia.<sup>21</sup>

According to early Melton chronicler Alexander Cameron, horse races were first organised in the area by Rockbank farmer William Keating. Keating owned racehorses of his own, and many brought horses from Melbourne for the events, which 'drew large gatherings'.<sup>22</sup> Melton Racing Club meetings were held on the Exford Estate with the permission of H. W. Staughton, who built a small wooden grandstand in 1882. Other early races and sports meetings are said to have been held in the vicinity of the current-day Melton golf course.<sup>23</sup> An 1884 article reported that Melton's 'race programme ... equals any put forth by country towns of far greater size'.<sup>24</sup>

Ernest Clarke was another important figure in the early horse racing industry in Melton. He established the Melton Stud in 1902, which bred numerous successful racehorses. Perhaps most notably The Welkin, one of the most famous stallions in Australian horse racing in the early twentieth century. The Welkin sired Gloaming, bred by Clarke at the Melton stud in 1915 and one

1980-2018





**Gloaming, one of Australia's greatest champion racehorses, was bred in Melton in 1915.**

E.F. Pollock, State Library of Queensland, 702692-19241206-s002b

of Australia's greatest champion racehorses. During a long and prestigious career in both Australia and New Zealand, Gloaming achieved a triumphant 57 wins out of 67 starts and won a record amount of prize money.<sup>25</sup>

Ken Cox purchased the Stockwell Stud in Diggers Rest in 1957 and developed it into one of the largest and most renowned thoroughbred breeders in Australia. With its top-class facilities, international design standards and scientific methods, Stockwell became 'the flagship of the Victorian breeding industry'.<sup>26</sup> As well as racing studs, numerous trotting tracks were established on the flat plains around Melton in the 1960s.<sup>27</sup> Other studs to play a leading role in the development of Melton as thoroughbred country were Cornwall Park and Merrywood at Toolern Vale, St John's Lane Stud at Diggers Rest and Birchwood, Teppo Park and Dreelburn in the far north-east of the shire, near Sunbury.<sup>28</sup>

By 1985, thoroughbred horse breeding was such big business in Melton that the shire council adopted the slogan 'The Heart of Thoroughbred Country', which was used throughout its promotional material.<sup>29</sup> But the slogan contained deeper meaning and was not just about Melton's great equine industry and thoroughbred champions, the council explained: "Thoroughbred Country" should be seen as a new concept of Melton, as a place where people can achieve the "Thoroughbred" ideal, excellence in all aspects of life'. The aim of the council in promoting 'The Heart of Thoroughbred Country', was 'to instil in present and future residents the feeling that this is a place that is better than others. A place to be proud of'.<sup>30</sup>

In 1988, Melton's champion reinsman Gavin Lang won his 176th race of the season, claiming the national harness racing record for the most wins in a single season.<sup>31</sup> The following year, the first Melton Plate was held at Moonee Valley Racecourse, cementing the district's importance in the harness racing industry. The inaugural winner was Victory's Phil, owned by local Danny Mullan.<sup>32</sup> By the 1990s, Melton had earned the title of the 'Home of Harness Racing in Victoria'. State-of-the-art, world-class harness racing facility and entertainment complex Tabcorp Park opened in Melton in 2009.<sup>33</sup>

In 2011, the Shire of Melton was home to over 140 registered trainers and over 1,200 horses.<sup>34</sup> The municipality's continuing leadership and influence in the industry today is a testament to the skills, talents and leadership of the local community over its history.

### Past, present and future

The rapid development of the satellite city movement saw huge residential estates take shape. The first was Westmelton, quickly followed by Kurunjang. Each of these new developments was marketed as offering a 'special town-and-country lifestyle ... far enough from the big city ... to let you relax in spacious rural freedom, yet close enough to get you quickly to your daily business'.<sup>35</sup> While much of the government's initial investment in the development of Melton as a satellite city was needed to upgrade or build basic infrastructure and roads, the appeal of the satellite city lifestyle inspired private development and community building that dramatically transformed the shire.<sup>36</sup>

Home building in the Shire of Melton had reached a record high by 1985. Building approvals were granted for 947 residential dwellings that year. Since most of the older parts of the shire that had been subdivided in the 1960s were by this stage almost all developed, most new homes were being built as part of new housing estates. Development was not confined to the township



**The residential estate of Kurunjang under construction. Melton's selection as a satellite city in 1974 saw the development of large residential estates and the construction of hundreds of houses for new residents drawn to the shire's 'special town-and-country lifestyle'.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 752







of Melton, with houses also being built in Rockbank, Diggers Rest and Melton South.<sup>37</sup> Brookfield Estate was one housing development that began in the 1980s in the south-west of the shire. With the Melton Reservoir and Djerriwarrh Creek forming a natural boundary, the new development grew rapidly and soon became a new suburb named Brookfield.<sup>38</sup> In order to keep up with the workload, the shire council employed two additional staff members to deal with building approvals.<sup>39</sup>

By the 1980s, the population had grown so much that the Melton Mechanics' Institute hall, which had provided generations of Meltonians with a place to gather, learn, attend to business and socialise, was no longer big enough. The hall lacked modern conveniences and failed to impress residents moving to the new satellite city. After much discussion, the Melton Mechanics' Institute committee decided that the shire council should be granted the responsibility of the hall and land. In December 1982, ownership of the site and buildings was transferred to the council.<sup>40</sup>

The old hall needed to be demolished, but its 1910 façade was retained as a reminder of the 'pioneer beginnings' of the town.<sup>41</sup> On 27 May 1983, the new Melton Community Hall was officially opened by Evan Walker, Minister for Planning and Conservation. Over 400 people attended the opening, including former and current councillors and local community members. Costing a total of \$800,000, the new hall featured an auditorium with the capacity to seat 500 people. It also offered meeting rooms and an attractive foyer area, providing space for cocktail parties, exhibitions and other displays.<sup>42</sup> The hall was flexible enough to provide options for any type of function. By the time of its opening, there were already 125 bookings from May to July 1983. Local organisations, including the Country Women's Association, Red Cross, Rotary, Apex clubs, State Emergency Services, volleyball club and the vintage car club, were among many to take advantage of the facilities the new hall offered.<sup>43</sup> While the new hall held huge potential as a gathering place for the active shire community, it did signal the end of an era for the Melton Mechanics' Institute. The committee held its final meeting on 16 March 1984 after 116 years of operation.<sup>44</sup>

The Melton Community Resource Centre, which was established on Station Road in the mid-1970s, offered residents a wide range of human services and activities. Dubbed 'the human heart of Melton', the centre was described in 1982 as full of busy people 'planning programs and activities or providing counselling and guidance, that will affect the lives of every person in Melton in some small way or some future time'.<sup>45</sup> Programs included family day care and after-school

**OPPOSITE**  
**Members of the Melton Mechanics' Institute officially transferred ownership of the site and building to the shire council on 17 December 1982. The rear of the Mechanics' Institute building (bottom left) was subsequently demolished to make way for the construction of a large, modern community hall (bottom right), which opened in 1983.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 1569, 1570, 875, 1577

1980-2018



**The Sunshine-Melton Library Service opened in Melton in 1979.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 1660

**A mothers' group meeting at Melton's infant welfare centre, c. 1980.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 1115

and holiday care. There was a resident youth worker and social worker, toy library and adult education centre. State-of-the-art equipment for rent included a 16mm sound projector and access to a 'duplication machine'.<sup>46</sup> In 1979 the Sunshine-Melton Library Service opened for the first time at 31 McKenzie Street, Melton. While shire residents had access to books through the Toolern Vale free library and the local Mechanics' Institutes in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the closure of the Melton Mechanics' Institute library in 1966 meant that Melton residents had been without a local library for the past 13 years.<sup>47</sup>

The shire council established the Melton Recreation Advisory Committee to make recommendations to the council on various recreational activities and events. After an inquiry into the shire's youth population was published in 1982, the council had the needs of young people at the forefront of their minds when developing services and infrastructure. Lack of transport, recreation spaces and facilities, and education options, as well as unemployment rates, featured prominently in the report.<sup>48</sup>

In 1985, a much-needed Community Health Centre opened in Melton. Located on the first floor of the Melton Markets Building, the centre offered services including speech therapy, occupational therapy, nutrition, and psychological and family counselling.<sup>49</sup> The same year, the Melton Progress Association was formed and submitted to the shire council various matters arising from an increased rate structure.<sup>50</sup> A few years earlier, the Melton Ratepayers Association had formed as a result of community members taking a more active interest in increased development and council rates and payments.<sup>51</sup>

In 1988 the Shire of Melton underwent a major restructure. The boundaries of the four ridings were reassessed at the request of the state government as a result of the increased population. This re-division was to ensure that there remained an equal number of voters in each electorate, so that the democratic principal of 'one vote, one value' was achieved.<sup>52</sup>

Commercial development was also a major feature of the mid-1980s. The Melton Regional Shopping Complex on High Street and Barries Road, known locally as 'The Regional', celebrated almost ten years of operation. It was the first major shopping complex built in the shire and had the feel of a local market, with fresh food available, as well as clothing and homewares stores, including Venture Department Store. In 1987, a second major commercial development took place with the establishment of a new Safeway shopping complex on the corner of Coburns Road and the Western Highway. The 'Council News' publication reported:

A rapidly changing streetscape is the most obvious sign of the dramatic growth in commercial development currently occurring in Melton. Reaching a population figure of 30,000 evidently acted as a catalyst, stimulating renewed interest in Melton as an attractive proposition for investors.<sup>53</sup>

**'The Regional' was the first major shopping complex built in the Shire of Melton.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 987

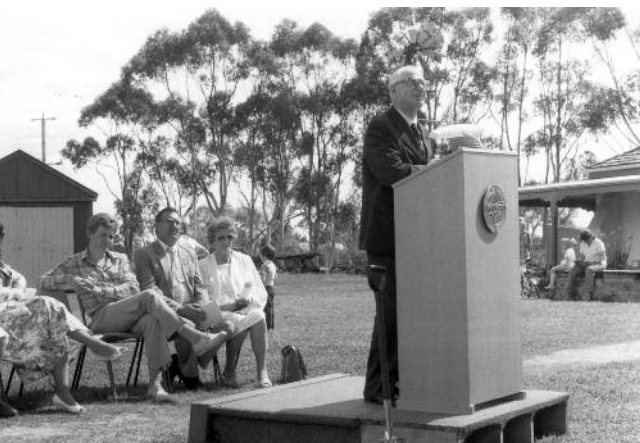
The last of the private street development was finalised by mid-1987, and the council hoped this would mean 'the dust bowls of Melton's unmade private streets' would remain only a memory.<sup>54</sup> The following year saw the completion of another major project: the shire's sewerage system.<sup>55</sup>

The rapidly growing satellite city community was looking to the future, seeing progress and development as the way forward. Two historic hotels that had been fixtures of Melton since the nineteenth century, Mac's and the Golden Fleece, made way for development in the 1970s. While they were both rebuilt as modern pubs, the loss of the original buildings was symptomatic of a



1980-2018





**ABOVE**

**Champion Australian cyclist Sir Hubert Opperman, who lived in Melton as a child, speaking at the launch of the shire's history *Melton: Plains of Promise*, at The Willows on 27 October 1985.**

J.T. Collins Collection, La Trobe Picture Collection. State Library Victoria, H98.250/168

**RIGHT**

**Built in the 1850s, The Willows was purchased by Melton Shire Council in a dilapidated state in 1972. At a time of rapid change and growth, the restoration of the homestead, its transformation into the headquarters of the Melton & District Historical Society and the creation of The Willows Historical Park saw the community embrace its past while simultaneously looking to the future.**

Melton City Council

dramatically changing Melton High Street. Few historic buildings or symbols of the shire's pioneering past survived the transformation.<sup>56</sup>

While most people were focused on building a city for the future, some in the shire were also keen to preserve its past. The Melton & District Historical Society was established in 1968, just as the population boom began.<sup>57</sup> Noticing the rapid subdivision and development occurring in the shire, members of the historical society, as well as some concerned residents, advocated for the preservation of some significant aspects of the district's colonial past.<sup>58</sup> Having purchased the historic homestead known as The Willows in 1972, the following year the council held a public meeting to determine public interest in establishing it as part of a historical park. The Mayor reported that those at the meeting showed 'considerable public enthusiasm' for the idea. A submission to the Australian Heritage Council stated:



Melton is destined to become, by the end of the present century, a city of between 75,000 and 100,000 people. Significant relics of the past, such as 'The Willows', regrettably will be rare in that situation. It is essential that sufficient tangible links with Melton's pioneering days remain to promote in the new community a sense of history and continuity.<sup>59</sup>

The Willows was one of the oldest buildings left in the shire and remains so today. Built in the mid-1850s, it was classified as historically significant at a local level by the National Trust in 1975. The building was restored and became the headquarters of the Melton & District Historical Society. To establish a historical park and save other remainders of the shire's past, two other buildings were added to the site. Bluestone cottage Dunvegen was built in 1875 on Smith Street. Originally the police station, it later became a family home and much later, Civil Defence Headquarters. It was relocated to The Willows Historical Park in 1977. A weatherboard cottage built in 1911 and known as Mac's Cottage was also relocated to the park in 1977, and converted into a caretaker's residence.<sup>60</sup> The Willows Historical Park was officially opened on 26 March 1982 by the Governor of Victoria, Sir Brian Murray. It was an impressive gala event, with a large number of councillors, staff members, school children, civic dignitaries and members of the Melton & District Historical Society in attendance.<sup>61</sup>

At the same time that The Willows Historical Park opened, the shire council advertised for a Shire Historian to produce a history of the shire in time for Victoria's 150th anniversary celebrations in 1985.<sup>62</sup> This resulted in the publication of *Melton: Plains of Promise* by Joan Starr. While enthusiastically embracing progress and looking to the road ahead, the community also kept a firm grasp on where it had come from.

### **Building the bypass**

One of the most dramatic changes during the mid-1980s was the completion of the Melton bypass project. As early as 1966, the shire council, together with the Country Roads Board, had discussed the possibility of building a road to relieve congestion in the High Street and allow commercial vehicles to bypass Melton on the way to Melbourne. In 1973, the plans for the bypass were amended to take into account Melton's rapid growth and the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works' 1971 planning policy, which included Melton as an urban development corridor.<sup>63</sup>

1980-2018



**Construction of the Western Highway Melton Bypass at Ferris Road in 1984.**

Melton & District Historical Society, 1842 and 1846

Construction of the 8.8 kilometre bypass commenced in 1983. The project received \$32 million funding from the Bicentennial Road Development Program, but final costs came closer to \$45 million.<sup>64</sup> It was a huge undertaking and involved major earthworks between Ferris and Station roads, as well as remodelling of Toolern Creek.<sup>65</sup> The bypass required existing roads to be redirected in order to join the new highway. This was carried out in two stages, with the 1.7 kilometre deviation of the Keilor–Melton Road completed in December 1987, and the 1.4 kilometre deviation of the Gisborne–Melton Road in 1988.<sup>66</sup>

Local resident Rachel Matthew-Hines was a teenager when the bypass was completed. She remembers riding her horse in the area before construction began:

Our family lived close to where the freeway is now, it was all paddocks before the freeway was constructed and my Mum could watch me walk across the paddocks to Coburn Primary School. I have many fond memories of the country town I grew up in.<sup>67</sup>

Casey Armer moved with his family to Melton when he was five years old and he was a child when the bypass was being built. He remembers the devastating fires of Ash Wednesday in February 1983. 'At the time', he recalls, 'they had a dirt mound where Coburns Road overpass of the freeway is', which ended up creating a barrier against the fires. Without that, Casey commented, 'a lot more houses would've been taken'.<sup>68</sup> The excess soil left over from the bypass was later used to create Mount Carberry Recreation Reserve on Exford Road, Melton South.<sup>69</sup>

With the bypass finished and the clear focus on residential, commercial and industrial development, many of the shire's rural residents found themselves and their livelihoods severely impacted. The high price of land and property rates meant that most of the owners of large farms were unable to continue their traditional occupations. Many faced the choice of either selling up and subdividing their lands, or moving further away to more rural areas to continue their agricultural businesses and lifestyle.<sup>70</sup>

### **A case for more schools**

With so many families moving to the shire, the question of education was a constant concern. Despite the rapid development of the 1970s, which included the establishment of schools, more



were needed to cope with the exploding population. Catholic Regional College opened in 1980 to provide a secondary school option for students graduating from the local Catholic primary schools. Just two years later, a junior campus was opened at North Keilor and a senior campus in Sydenham.<sup>71</sup> In 1984, St Catherine of Siena primary school opened in Melton West in the parklands of Catholic Regional College.<sup>72</sup>

By 1981 Melton West Primary School had close to 1,000 students – way beyond its capacity of 360. At the end of that year, the area was split into two school zones, and a new primary school, Wedge Park, was created. In May 1982, the Wedge Park Primary School buildings were completed and the school opened with 238 students.<sup>73</sup>

The early 1980s saw Melton High School as the largest secondary school in Victoria, with over 1,000 students. While the Shire of Melton had two other options for secondary education, one of these was Melton Technical School, which offered very specific, practical courses that were not aimed at those students planning to pursue tertiary education. The newly established Catholic Regional College provided more of an academic focus, but as it only offered education to Catholic students and finished at Year 10, it was not enough to cope with demand.<sup>74</sup> Hundreds of Melton students were still forced to travel beyond the shire to continue their secondary education. It was estimated that 160 students were attending independent schools like Ballarat Grammar, Geelong Grammar, Penleigh and Essendon Grammar, Braemar College, and others across Melbourne.<sup>75</sup> It was while dropping his son at the bus stop one morning, on his way to Penleigh and Essendon Grammar, that Graeme Watkinson, a local Uniting Church Minister, decided to initiate the establishment of an independent college in Melton.<sup>76</sup>

The first meeting for the establishment of an independent school in Melton took place on 11 December 1980. A crowd of 130 people gathered in the Uniting Church Hall, eager to hear plans for a local schooling option for their families. From this initial meeting, an interim committee of nine people was established with the goal of investigating the viability of establishing an independent Christian secondary school in Melton.<sup>77</sup>

It took three long years before this committee was able to find the perfect location for the new school. Initial site selections met with controversy and funding was a perpetual problem. For a time, it seemed that the dream of establishing an independent secondary school in Melton might never become reality. However, in June 1982 the committee discovered a site on Centenary Avenue that was previously part of Maryborough Knitting Mills, but was no longer in use. The



committee could see the potential offered by the site, and called a public meeting to discuss turning the old mill site into a school. The existing buildings were converted into temporary school buildings, while architect Norman Day produced an innovative design for a completely new school. The committee anticipated an initial enrolment of 120 students, which would rise to 750 by the 1990s.<sup>78</sup>

With funding from the federal schools commission, money raised through the local community and loans from the Commonwealth Savings Bank and the Rotary Club of Melton, construction of Mowbray College began.<sup>79</sup> Designed by architect Norman Day, the school was built in an innovative postmodern style. Day's vision was for the school's students to feel as comfortable and familiar at school as in their own homes. He based the design on the local suburban typology. The buildings consisted of individual self-contained classrooms, each with a front door, back door and garden. Each class retained the same homeroom for the duration of their schooling. Norman Day won the inaugural Lustig & Moar Architectural Prize in 1988 for his Mowbray College design, and the Australian Library Promotion Council/RAIA Library Design Award for the school's library building.<sup>80</sup>

The school officially opened on 7 February 1983 with an enrolment of 93 students from Prep to Year 7. Mark Fergus was a Prep student in the school's inaugural year. He later remembered:

It was good then because everyone knew each other. Our first few weeks at school we had classes in the Guide Hall because the Mill wasn't finished. The rest of the school where the Labs and Coppin Court are now was only a big paddock.<sup>81</sup>

Another Prep student, Brooke Harrison, recalled:

The only recreation we had was the rough playground which consisted of monkey bars, old tractor tyres and a sandpit and high bars. Accidents were a frequent occurrence in those days! It was a friendly atmosphere, you know everyone and their business ... During some classes we used to do horticultural work and planted trees out the front of the school.<sup>82</sup>

In 2003, Mowbray College celebrated two decades of educating students in Melton. By that stage, the school had expanded to two campuses with over 1,450 students and 120 staff. It was

**OPPOSITE**  
**Wedge Park Primary School**  
**students in 1984. The school**  
**opened in 1982 to relieve**  
**pressure on Melton West**  
**Primary School.**

Melton & District Historical Society

1980-2018





**Mowbray College opened in a converted knitting mill in 1983, filling the need for an independent secondary school in the shire.**

Melton & District Historical Society

estimated that over the twenty years since its establishment, 13,000 students passed through the gates.<sup>83</sup> By the mid-2000s, the school offered an International Baccalaureate program and operated across three campuses: the original campus, named Patterson after the first principal, and the Brookside and Town Centre campuses, both located in Caroline Springs.

Unfortunately, in 2012 Mowbray College found itself in an unmanageable situation. The community had lost faith in the school's financial security and as a result some parents withheld their school fees, fearing the school would collapse. It had been in financial difficulty since the mid-2000s and by 2012 was \$28 million in debt.<sup>84</sup> In June 2012, all three campuses closed and within four months, each of the campuses of the former Mowbray College had been purchased by other education institutes. Heathdale Christian College bought the original Mowbray campus and established its own campus there and Grace Children's Services bought the Brookside campus.<sup>85</sup> The Town Centre campus was purchased by Intaj Khan from the Western Institute of Technology but remained vacant after some failed attempts at re-establishing a school. In 2017 the Australian International Academy established an Islamic school on the site.<sup>86</sup>

In 1986, Kurunjang Post Primary School opened, providing another option for secondary education. The 'post primary school' philosophy was to provide students with access to both technical and academic education, allowing them to choose the path best suited to them. In its first year of operation, Kurunjang had 150 students enrol in Year 7. In 1989 the name of the school was changed to Kurunjang Secondary College.<sup>87</sup> That same year, Kurunjang Primary School opened its doors for the first time, two years after its construction was approved.<sup>88</sup>

The Western Institute, a tertiary institution established in 1986 to serve the higher education needs of people in the western suburbs, opened a campus in Melton in January 1987. It was located in the Melton annexe of the Footscray College of TAFE, but soon found its own permanent home on the corner of Rees and Wilson roads.<sup>89</sup> The new campus was officially opened in 1990 by Prime Minister Bob Hawke.<sup>90</sup>

The Western Institute provided students in the western suburbs with an option for further education, but there was still a desperate need for a university in the west of Melbourne. In 1990 the state government passed the Victorian University of Technology Act. A merger between the Western Institute and Footscray Institute of Technology led to the creation of Victoria University of Technology (VUT). The Melton campus of Victoria University opened in January 1992 and remained until 2011.<sup>91</sup>

### Towards a new century

As the Shire of Melton entered the final decade of the twentieth century, it was almost unrecognisable from the small agricultural township of one hundred years before. In the four years from 1989 to 1993, the shire saw an average of 450 new dwellings constructed each year. With close to 1,600 new residents settling in the area annually, the population of the Shire of Melton was estimated at 38,500 people by 1993. The vast majority of the population lived within the township of Melton, with the remaining 6,000 in rural areas and the smaller townships of Diggers Rest, Rockbank, Toolern Vale and the new growth area of Melton East.<sup>92</sup> While the shire still had significantly less migrants and residents of non-English speaking backgrounds than the City of Melbourne, by the early 1990s residents from Vietnam, South Africa and Malaysia were the fastest growing demographic.<sup>93</sup> A Migrant Resource Centre was established to 'examine the needs of the growing proportion of residents of non-English speaking background in the community'.<sup>94</sup> The council anticipated this community would keep growing and that 'increased liaison and co-operation with the Migrant Resource Centre' would continue into the near future.<sup>95</sup>

The attractive opportunities that the Shire of Melton offered to new residents, including housing affordability and proximity to Melbourne, meant that the population continued to increase. But population increase was not matched by industrial growth or an increase in community services or local jobs. Many residents still had to travel outside the shire for work and the limits of local commercial development meant that many continued to do their shopping outside the shire as well.<sup>96</sup> Arthur Fern was Chief Superintendent of the Country Fire Authority and lived in central Melton in the early 1990s. He commented that the shire needed:

... more employment, because most people travel to [the] Western Suburbs where they most likely do their shopping and spend their money. [The] community needs to attract a large employer.<sup>97</sup>

It became a priority of the local council to investigate how to stimulate the development of industries and businesses that could provide local jobs, as well as commercial opportunities.

Public transport was also second-rate when compared with metropolitan standards, and the population of Melton was largely reliant on cars. The early 1990s saw private bus transportation undergo a review that resulted in more efficient bus routes. Prior to this, there

was just one circular route through residential parts of the shire, and the bus route to Sunshine did not connect to the railway station. The new service included three routes connecting with both the Sunshine railway station and Melton railway station. However, public transport schedules remained infrequent and limited on weekends.<sup>98</sup>

The Shire of Melton still retained much of its rural character, with many open spaces, waterways and small farms on the outskirts of the bustling township. But, given a drastic reduction in agriculture and farming productivity in the previous decade, the economic viability of land management became a pressing issue for residents on rural properties. As a result of the continual spread of urban and residential sprawl, those still farming faced increasing problems, such as trespassers, vandalism, noxious plant infestation and wild dogs.<sup>99</sup> In the early 1990s the shire council began looking to local conservation, with the aim of encouraging local residents to take an active role in protecting and preserving the natural landscapes that attracted many of them to Melton in the first place.<sup>100</sup>



**A historic bluestone barn was restored during the development of the Darlingsford residential estate and is now used as a community function space.**

Melton City Council



Councillor Mike Kilgariff was elected Mayor of the Shire of Melton in 1992. He was from Diggers Rest and described as one of only a dozen true agricultural farmers in the shire. 'It's a battle for the farmers', he said in an interview after his election:

Really the Shire of Melton is no longer a farming area ... Melton has become a place for lifestyle farmers who work [in] town during the week and play with a few animals on the weekend.<sup>101</sup>

Changes to the way rates were charged caused tensions in the community during this period, which resulted in certain areas of the shire wanting to break away and join a different local council. Some unsatisfied Rockbank and West Sydenham residents caused consternation with an ultimately failed push for annexation to Keilor, while a small number of Diggers Rest residents held an unsuccessful secession rally to become part of the Shire of Bulla.<sup>102</sup>



**Members of the Pinkerton family in November 2017 at the opening of the time capsule that was buried in 1992 to mark the rejuvenation of the land through the Surbiton Park and Pinkerton Forest projects. A time capsule was first buried in the memorial cairn marking the graves of members of the early settler family in 1931. A third time capsule was created in 2017, to be opened in 2042.**

Photographer Sharon Walker, On Location Photography. Melton City Council



Meanwhile, expansion continued. The largest residential development in two decades was proposed in 1992. The 1,200-block development of Westlake was an extension of the Westmelton Satellite City development that had begun in 1969.<sup>103</sup> Much like the initial development, Westlake was described as ‘futuristic’ in design.<sup>104</sup> Investigation was underway for another new estate, named Darlingsford after the historic homestead that once stood on the site. The estate’s developers were required to retain and restore the surviving original bluestone barn, which became a community function space.<sup>105</sup>

As the Melton East growth corridor was being developed so rapidly, the Melton Council proposed to divide the area into several separate suburbs. The names of these new suburbs were chosen to reflect the history and geography of the area. Hillside was named after a local farm. Burnside was named for James and Rachel Burnside, who settled on the area in the 1860s. Ravenhall was the name of a former rail spur and explosives factory in the same location.<sup>106</sup>

A fourth suburb was proposed, consisting of land adjoining Taylors Road. The Melton & District Historical Society suggested the name Stoney Park, because the area contained ‘the worst of the dry stone ground’, but the council felt this would be seen as overly negative.<sup>107</sup> Instead, the suburb was named after the Mortons, a long-time farming family in the area.<sup>108</sup> This suburb later became Taylors Hill, named in 2000 for another longstanding local family.

As part of the development of Surbiton Park – a 400-hectare property developed for recycling wastewater and sewage, adjacent to the Melton Wastewater Purification Plant – a time capsule was created to capture a snapshot of the Shire of Melton in 1992. Surveys were conducted with young Meltonians, who commented on what they liked and disliked about the shire and what they thought it might look like when the capsule was opened in 25 years time. On 8 November 2017, the time capsule was opened by decedents of the Pinkerton family, who were early settlers in the district. The contents of the time capsule provided insight into the past, and an opportunity for current-day Meltonians to better understand the changing needs of their community.

The time capsule revealed comments on the excellent sporting and recreational facilities of the shire, as well as community services. Nineteen-year-old Kylie Wickham said that she thought Melton in 1992, was ‘young and has plenty of potential to become a great community’.<sup>109</sup> Kylie had three predictions for the Melton of 2017, suggesting that it would either grow significantly, become a ‘small and depleted town’, or ‘be connected to Melbourne completely’. Ten-year-old Danielle Chambers described Melton as ‘nice, not noisy like the city, it’s safer and

it's not smelly like the city'. 'People could do a bit more to keep it clean though', she added.<sup>110</sup> Fifteen-year-old Beth Sandilands attended Mowbray College and did not like much about Melton. She thought it was 'growing too fast' and that there was 'not enough stuff for young kids'.<sup>111</sup> Susan Lorna Wood, 18 years old, predicted that by 2017 Melton would be 'just another suburb of Melbourne and lose its country feel'.<sup>112</sup> A new time capsule was created containing contemporary images, information, newspapers and messages for future generations. It is to be opened in 2042, in another 25 years' time. Melton Mayor Councillor Bob Turner commented after the burial of the 2017 time capsule, 'I couldn't help but wonder what future generations will think of us, and how much things will have changed in 25 years'.<sup>113</sup>

### **The Kennett restructure**

The year 1994 was a transformative one for the state of Victoria. The state government, under the leadership of Premier Jeff Kennett, set out to dramatically restructure local government across the state. The restructure saw the state government take control of local governance, suspending democracy, sacking 1,600 elected councillors and consolidating 210 municipalities into just 78.<sup>114</sup> The Shire of Melton survived the process with a few minor boundary changes, and was able to retain its name, unlike many others. The shire's annual report for the financial year 1994 to 1995 reported:

On 15 December 1994, Commissioners were appointed to the Melton Shire Council with the charter of assuming the traditional decision-making responsibilities of the Council and implementing Victoria's Local Government reforms. The new Melton Shire Council consists of the former Shire of Melton, the Punjel area of the former Shire of Bulla and the Exford district of the former City of Werribee.<sup>115</sup>

This controversial restructure included a process of downsizing and outsourcing, with the introduction of competitive tendering. At least 50 per cent of council expenditure was to go out to tender. The annual report described a change from a 'traditional local Government structure to a performance-based structure' under the supervision of government-appointed commissioners.<sup>116</sup> These commissioners remained in control until the return of democratically elected councillors

#### **OPPOSITE**

**Morton Homestead, part of the Dalgook Farm Complex in Taylor's Hill, was built in 1906 as part of the Overnewton closer settlement estate and is now used as a community activity centre.**

Melton City Council

**The view over Burnside, one of the suburbs created in the Melton East growth corridor in the 1990s, with the Burnside Children's and Community Centre in the foreground.**

Melton City Council

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**Allenby Road, Hillside during the construction of homes in 2001. Hillside was one of the fastest growing communities in the development of new suburbs in East Melton.**

Courtesy Troy Watson

**View over the reserve on Allenby Road, Hillside.**

Melton City Council

in 1997.<sup>117</sup> Many local people and businesses then had to tender against outside competitors for contracts that they had previously held. Rates were cut and a cap put in place, but the commissioners were also charged with reducing council expenditure, and community and social welfare services suffered as a result.<sup>118</sup>

While the council was transitioning to its new structure, the Shire of Melton continued to grow and develop at a very fast pace. With 85 per cent of the total population of approximately 40,000 people under the age of 45 years, the shire was young, active and growing.<sup>119</sup> In February 1995, after extensive redevelopment of the original outdoor pool, the Melton Waves Leisure Centre opened – the first indoor wave pool in Australia and a source of endless enjoyment for children from all over.<sup>120</sup> Hillside was gazetted as a suburb as part of the development of East Melton and it became one of the fastest growing communities. Encompassing Banchory Grove, Bellevue Hill, Settlers Rise and Sugargum Farm, Hillside was expected to grow close to an estimated 4,500 households in the near future.<sup>121</sup> The 1996 Annual Report described the shire as an ‘absorbing mix of urban and rural living opportunities’ with ‘well-established housing and flourishing new estates’.<sup>122</sup> The vision for the Shire of Melton was to be recognised as:

... a world class place to live, work and visit due to its unique combination of urban and rural lifestyles, proximity to both metropolitan Melbourne, rural Victoria and major transport routes and nodes, its dynamic economy and vibrant community.<sup>123</sup>

In 1997 the Melton Shire Council submitted a list of 14 names to the Victorian Place Names committee, to be recognised as the official names of the suburbs within the shire. It consisted of Toolern Vale, Diggers Rest, Kurunjang, Melton South, Rockbank, Melton, Plumpton, Brookfield, Mt Cottrell, Truganina, Ravenhall, Melton West, Burnside and Caroline Springs.<sup>124</sup> This list contained earlier suburbs that had been gazetted already, as well as some former residential developments that were now recognised as suburbs in their own right. It also included the first planned community suburb, Caroline Springs.

# Caroline Springs

Starting with a single butcher shop in Moonee Ponds in around 1900, RJ Gilberston Pty Ltd developed into one of Australia's top three meat processors, smallgoods manufacturers and retailing operations.<sup>125</sup> As chairman in the early 1990s, local landowner George Gilberston realised that the company's land came under the newly zoned West Growth Corridor and envisioned a new residential suburb developing. Together with his daughter Christine, George established the Original Land Owners Liaison, a partnership group with the other landowners in the area, and began negotiations with Delfin Lend Lease property developers.

George had the land rezoned and developed the name Caroline Springs, chosen for the historical connection to Caroline Chisholm, a nineteenth century welfare worker who built shelters for diggers and their families traveling along the nearby Mt Alexander Road to the goldfields in the 1850s.<sup>126</sup> By 1997 construction was underway. The following year, the first three villages were launched: Chisholm Park, Brookside and Springlake.

By 1998, the first block of land sold for \$53,000 and the initial residents began moving in.<sup>127</sup> The following year, the first school opened in Caroline Springs, a second campus of the existing Mowbray College. Starting out with just 38 students, the school quickly grew to reach 292 by 2003.

One year after the first block of land was sold, the new residents of Caroline Springs celebrated the inaugural Carols by Candlelight at Springlake, the first residents' barbecue, the opening of the public tennis and basketball courts and the launch of two more villages – Cobblestone and The Grove.<sup>128</sup> Development of residential houses continued, as well as community services needed to build and support this growing community. A council-run preschool and child and maternal health centre opened in the year 2000, as well as two more primary schools and the Brookside Early Learning Centre.

By 2001, Caroline Springs had a population of 2,823 people, but was predicted to grow to 23,000.<sup>129</sup> Construction began on Lake Caroline that year and soon after, the Promenade on Lake Caroline foreshore was launched. Brookside development continued in the early 2000s with the

1980-2018



**The development of Caroline Springs began in 1997. The first residents began moving in the following year, and it grew at a rapid rate, with the establishment of schools, recreational facilities, and public transport connections. Today it is a thriving community of over 24,000 residents.**

Melton City Council

establishment of recreational facilities including two sports ovals, and the Djerriwarrh Festival was held there for the first time.<sup>130</sup>

The bridge over Kororoit Creek on Caroline Springs Boulevard was constructed connecting it to the Western Highway, and CS Square Shopping Centre, a \$25 million project, opened in 2004. By 2005, resident 10,000 moved into Caroline Springs.<sup>131</sup>

Caroline Springs was recognised at the Urban Development Institute of Australia Awards for Excellence Ceremony in 2006 as Australia's Best Master Planned Community.<sup>132</sup> The suburb continued to grow with the launch of three more villages: Northlake, Edenfield and Ridgewater. The development of a \$19 million recreational precinct in 2008 included a library, skate park and three multipurpose sports courts. Judges of the Keep Australia Beautiful awards described the Caroline Springs Library and Civic Centre as 'architecturally stunning' when it was awarded the Community Pride award that same year.<sup>133</sup>

By 2011, the population had grown to 20,366 people and the area included ten schools, a police station, civic centre, library, retirement village, shopping complex, multiple recreation facilities, childcare facilities, and a wide range of community groups and events.<sup>134</sup> But it was still largely a car-dependent suburb. A bus service was residents' only option for public transport. Despite inclusion in the Victorian Public Transport plan for 2008, the Caroline Springs train station was not operational until January 2017.<sup>135</sup> After waiting years for a train station to connect them to Melbourne, the residents of Caroline Springs were largely pleased to have a local train station, though many were concerned that it would reach capacity too quickly. Local resident Heather Facciolo reported that 'the trains are usually full when they come from Melton'.<sup>136</sup>

The final land was released for sale in 2011 and after 14 years of growth, developers and residents celebrated the completion of the project.<sup>137</sup> But the conclusion of the development was far from the end of the story for Caroline Springs. Christine Gilberston reflected on the community that was her father's original vision with pleasure. 'We are quite delighted with how the development has progressed. By and large it has exceeded our expectations with the look, the feel and the overall quality', said Christine, 'such a thriving community, is great to see'.<sup>138</sup>





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**ABOVE AND OPPOSITE**  
**Hundreds of First Nations people live in the City of Melton today. Reconciliation is an ongoing process, but through its Reconciliation Action Plan and initiatives including Kirrip House and annual cultural festivals, the Melton City Council is committed to promoting understanding, respect and inclusion in the local community.**

Melton City Council

In 2005, the Victorian government released a plan for the development of Melbourne's growth areas and established a Growth Areas Authority. The areas included Hume, Whittlesea, Wyndham, Casey-Cardinia and Melton-Caroline Springs.<sup>139</sup> The report for Melton-Caroline Springs stated that the rate of residential growth in Caroline Springs over the past five years was 'reminiscent of Melton's rapid growth that began in the 1970s'.<sup>140</sup> The report allowed for changes to urban growth boundaries that could provide enough room for an additional 33,000 to 37,000 houses, to accommodate an additional 78,000 to 88,000 people.<sup>141</sup>

### **Aboriginal Melton today**

In 2006 the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act was established to protect the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of First Nations people; empower traditional owners as the protectors of their heritage; strengthen the ongoing relationship between traditional owners and their lands; and promote respect for Aboriginal cultural heritage.<sup>142</sup> That year there were 507 identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents living in the Shire of Melton. Many had come from a variety of different places across Australia and were not necessarily from the traditional owner groups of the area. Many of these residents, like First Nations people across Australia, had experienced disenfranchisement and disconnection from family, place and culture.<sup>143</sup>

Melton in the year 2006 was a far cry from the town in which Antoinette Braybrook grew up during the 1970s. Recalling her childhood in Melton, Antoinette comments:

We were the first, and for a long time the only, Aboriginal family in town – my mum and brothers, aunty and our cousins. Easily recognisable as the 'Aborigines' around town we were in most other aspects invisible, unless of course there was a disturbance on Saturday night or a bit of street vandalism – then the spotlight would be on us! The 1967 Referendum which 'recognised' us as citizens in our own country was a political milestone which barely registered a ripple on the mill pond of Melton life. We were accustomed to the surveillance of the local police car when we were walking around town, the racist taunts and abusive language that would come 'out of the blue' if we dared catch the bus or the occasional spit ball from kids at school if we went to the drinking taps ahead of others.<sup>144</sup>



Antoinette's mother, Wanda Bargo, remembers the local police harassing her children on the streets. 'Antoinette, Shaun and their brother Ryan were constantly getting pulled up for the most ridiculous things – like riding on the footpath'.<sup>145</sup> Antoinette's brother Shaun Braybrook recalls, 'we were spat on, we were told we were stupid and that we would never amount to anything'.<sup>146</sup>

Despite leaving school at 15 years of age, Antoinette went on to have a very successful law career, becoming CEO of the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service, now called Djirra, in 2002. Reflecting on this in 2017, Antoinette notes that:

For me, once that little Aboriginal girl in Melton, a steely resolve has grown to join with other Aboriginal women around the nation to create the opportunities and the cultural space which will enable our women's voices to be heard. No longer invisible or silent, Aboriginal women – the keepers of the secrets of this land, our mothers, our nurturers and our leaders – will be valued and celebrated in this land.<sup>147</sup>

For many First Nations men, women and children living in the Melton area today, there are still challenges. In 2010, Melton Council adopted a Reconciliation Action Plan, which outlined a 'commitment to building mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to generate understanding, acceptance and inclusion in our local and wider community'.<sup>148</sup> Kirrip Aboriginal Corporation was established in 2007 as one positive action towards changing this. It was set up by the Melton City Council to provide services to the local Aboriginal communities in and around Melton. Kirrip House in Melton South is a place for the local Aboriginal population to gather, and to continue the work of their ancestors and Elders in creating a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>149</sup>

Members of the Aboriginal Elders Group that meets regularly at Kirrip House comment that there is 'still a stigma' about being Aboriginal in Melton today. Some describe experiencing discrimination based on their appearance being 'not black enough' or not looking 'Aboriginal'. One Elder comments that, in many ways, 'Being a First Nations person in this day and age sucks'.<sup>150</sup> Kirrip House was established in response to a recognised need for Aboriginal people to come together, and to advocate for services for the community in Melton. While one Elder feels that there is still a long way to go in terms of government acknowledgement and community acceptance, the momentum is there, 'it's starting to improve and it's unstoppable now'.<sup>151</sup>



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#### PREVIOUS PAGES

**The annual Djerriwarrh Festival and Harmony Day are highlights of the Melton City Council calendar of community events, bringing people together from across the municipality to celebrate the community's cultural heritage and broad cultural diversity.**

Melton City Council

The City of Melton has established an increasing range of events and organisations to help celebrate Aboriginal culture and to provide services for the local Indigenous community. Djerriwarrh Health Services offers health and social services specifically catering to members of the local Indigenous community, as well as the community at large in Melton. Other events such as the Melton South Dream Big Festival provide opportunities for the Aboriginal community to celebrate culture and survival, as do various other Aboriginal social and ceremonial events around the city.

The Djerriwarrh Festival is another event held annually in the City of Melton, where community, culture and heritage are proudly and positively celebrated. One community Elder recalled her experience at the 2017 festival: 'It was a feeling of being grounded and dignified. I could feel culture coming from me. From shame to pride'.<sup>152</sup> The Djerriwarrh Festival started in 1979, beginning as a fire awareness exercise and a family carnival run by the Melton Country Fire Authority and the Lions Club of Melton. It has since grown to become one of the biggest festivals on the City of Melton's events calendar.<sup>153</sup> Described as 'Melton's signature, most beloved community event', it is a day filled with celebrations including a street parade and carnival, food vendors, buskers, music on stage and a whole host of activities.<sup>154</sup> It is a festival to celebrate Melton's cultural diversity and community.

There is still a long way to go towards reconciliation and respect for First Nations people in the City of Melton, as well as in communities across the country. Peter Webster, CEO of Kirrip House, explains that while the most recent 2016 census data revealed 2,648 residents in the City of Melton who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, he thinks that number could actually be double.<sup>155</sup> Reasons for not identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander on the census are numerous, but some people expect a negative reaction, meaning that they are reluctant to acknowledge their own Aboriginal heritage. But the actions of both the council and the local community suggest that the future is bright for First Nations people in Melton. The extraordinary history of the traditional owners of the Melton area is not just about the past, but is about living people. Their stories make up part of the wonderful diversity of Melton, which today includes the stories of other First Nations people, migrants, refugees, descendants of the pioneering families and new families who are arriving daily. Together, these communities form part of the rich history that is the story of Melton.



## The City of Melton

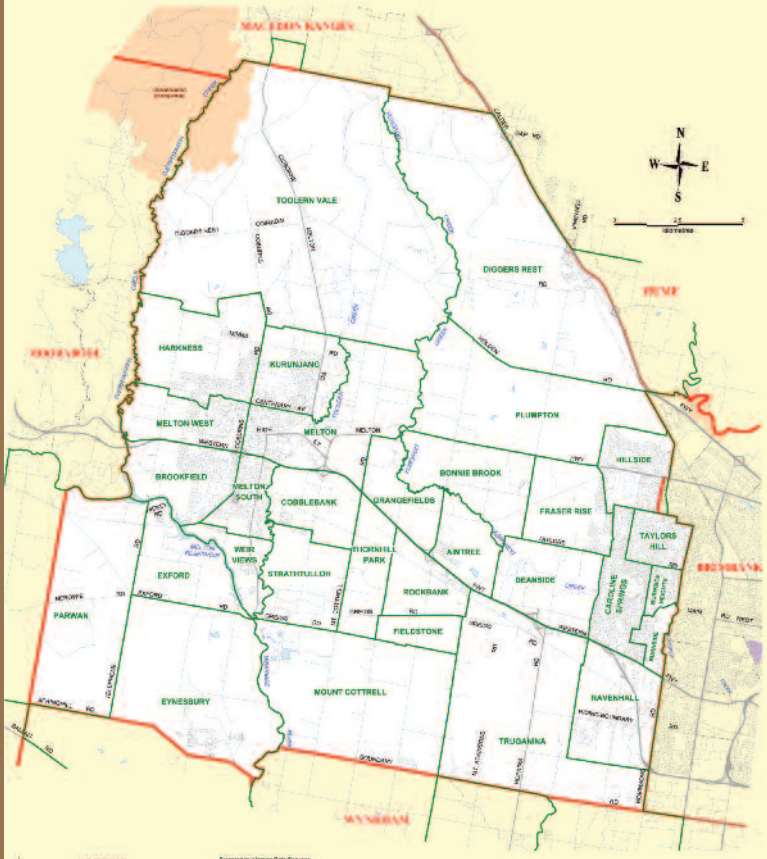
By 2004, the Shire of Melton had become Australia's fastest growing municipality.<sup>156</sup> The rapid growth and development that had characterised the past three decades seemed far from over. Much like the beginning of the satellite city era, the shire once again found itself needing to grow and develop in order to accommodate its increasing population. Unlike the 1970s, however, the shire's population was increasingly more diverse. The period of growth in the late 1960s and 1970s was characterised by young Anglo-Australians and British migrants moving to the shire, but, by 2001 over half the population of the shire was born overseas. While the United Kingdom remained a dominant migrant group, by this time the shire's population also included migrants from Malta, the Philippines, Italy, the Republic of Macedonia, New Zealand and Vietnam.<sup>157</sup> In the ten years between 2006 and 2016, the number of residents who spoke a language other than English at home increased by 127 per cent. The largest language groups were Punjabi, Filipino/Tagalog, Vietnamese and Arabic.<sup>158</sup>



**The construction of Bridge Road in Strathtulloh, 2017. Rapid growth and development has continued to characterise the Shire of Melton since it became Australia's fastest growing municipality in 2004.**

Melton City Council

# CITY OF MELTON LOCALITY (SUBURB) NAMES AND BOUNDARIES



**LEGEND**

— Locality (Suburb) Boundary  
— Local Government Boundary

Prepared by VicRoads Data Services, Local Government Victoria, Version 2.0, February 2017.  
 Some of the locality names shown on this map are not official names as defined by the Victorian Government.

**Government Gazette:**  
 21 January 1993, page 62  
 26 April 1996, page 616  
 15 May 1999, page 1116  
 10 August 2003, page 2013  
 13 October 2005, page 2087  
 4 May 2006, page 958  
 6 September 2011, page 2317  
 9 February 2017, page 158

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As the shire grew, the new developments and suburbs began to establish their own identities. Glen Ludbrook moved to Melton in 2002. After 15 years working and living in the area, he grew to know his neighbourhood quite well:

I have great neighbours. Living in Melton gives you the benefits of city living as it is in such close proximity to Melbourne CBD – but you’re still far enough to not get caught in the traffic!<sup>159</sup>

Annette Butterworth and her husband have lived in Melton ever since their marriage in 1975. When they found themselves with an empty nest after their children moved out, and seeking a bit more peace and quiet, they moved to Eynesbury in 2010. Annette explains: ‘Eynesbury is just quiet and peaceful. You wouldn’t think it was only 10 minutes out of Melton. I really enjoy the quietness’.<sup>160</sup>

Ajay Pasupulate migrated from India to Australia in the 1970s and built his home in Taylors Hill in 2010. Hoping to construct a second home in the Melton township, Ajay loves his neighbourhood, and comments:

It’s very secure here and the people are very friendly. Where I live, there are all different nationalities and my neighbours are all very friendly people. I also like the parks, the recreational facilities and there are plenty of options for kids’ schools.<sup>161</sup>

In September 2012, the municipality of Melton was awarded city status by the Minister for Local Government, Jeanette Powell.<sup>162</sup> It was a process that started in 2010, with the council undertaking several community consultations to gauge both the interest in changing the council status from shire to city, and also retaining or changing the Melton name. Several other names with historic meanings were put forward during the consultation phase, including Western Plains, Djerriwarrh, Staughton, Mowbray and Kororoit. The majority of residents consulted were in favour of changing from a shire to a city, but the majority were also keen to retain the name Melton.<sup>163</sup> By this stage, it was the second fastest growing local government area in Australia, with 42 families moving in each week and 43 new babies born every week.<sup>164</sup>

The same month that Melton was awarded city status, the Melton City Council began

**OPPOSITE LEFT**  
**This 2017 map of the City of Melton shows the boundaries of the municipality and suburb names, including several new additions.**

Melton City Council

**OPPOSITE RIGHT**  
**The view over Aintree, one of eleven new suburbs created in the City of Melton in 2017.**

Melton City Council

**The Western Highway, which links the City of Melton with Melbourne and transports more than 50,000 vehicles a day, has undergone significant recent upgrades to improve traffic flow.**

Melton City Council

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investigations into the process of establishing 11 new suburbs within the municipality. A period of extensive community consultation followed, as part of the process to establish new suburban boundaries, realign some existing boundaries and choose appropriate names for the new suburbs. In March 2013, the Suburb Naming Advisory Committee was established, including key stakeholders and community members who were charged with developing a shortlist of names. The committee, in consultation with the community, came up with a list of 172 possible names. This was shortlisted to 35 names and put to a public vote. A total of 16,000 votes were cast and a final list of 11 names was presented to Council.<sup>165</sup>

The first submission the council made to the Office of Geographic Names (OGN), to have the new suburb boundaries and names gazetted, was rejected because some of the boundaries of the new suburbs conflicted with the proposed, but not yet funded, Outer Metropolitan Ringroad.<sup>166</sup> Boundaries were redrawn and the new proposed suburbs were resubmitted, approved and officially gazetted on 8 February 2017.<sup>167</sup> The new suburbs were created in the area designated as a growth corridor between Melton township and Caroline Springs. They are: Aintree, Bonnie Brook, Cobblebank, Deanside, Fieldstone, Fraser Rise, Grangefields, Harkness, Strathulloh, Thornhill Park and Weir Views. The names chosen for these new suburbs reflect the history, heritage and community values of the growing city. Strathulloh and Deanside, for example, are both named for properties of notable pioneers to the area. Harkness is named after William Scott Harkness, a Scottish-born migrant who became manager of the Strathulloh property during the late nineteenth century. Fieldstone and Weir Views are two names that reflect the natural environment.<sup>168</sup>

The 11 new suburbs were created in response to the city's growing population. Between 2007 and 2016 the city's population increased by just over 61,000 residents.<sup>169</sup> The boundaries of the new suburbs were defined to ensure they each retain their own unique character. In some cases, this involved redefining suburban boundaries.<sup>170</sup> Each suburb has a maximum population of 20,000 people and will include the infrastructure needed for a thriving local community, including shopping centres, kindergartens, schools and open recreation spaces.<sup>171</sup>

The amount of land available for urban purposes in the City of Melton has increased by around 11,000 hectares since 2010. Between 2010 and 2018, land was released for development in the newly created suburbs of Aintree, Cobblebank, Deanside, Fraser Rise, Strathulloh, Thornhill Park, Weir Views, as well as Diggers Rest, Rockbank and Truganina.<sup>172</sup> Much like the satellite

city era of the 1970s, the City of Melton, along with Melbourne’s western suburbs, is expanding to accommodate anticipated population growth and the need for more developed employment centres, improved transportation and diverse neighbourhoods.

Growth in the City of Melton will largely be accommodated within the state government-defined urban growth boundary. Development of the land is guided by the West Growth Corridor Plan and the Sunbury–Diggers Rest Growth Corridor Plan. The growth corridor plans provide high level guidance on how metropolitan Melbourne’s growth will be managed into the future. Precinct structure plans are then developed for specific precincts within the urban growth areas. They implement the vision of the growth corridor plans by defining the future road network, open space and recreation networks, and the location of schools, community facilities and residential development. The west will continue to be a key provider of Victoria’s industrial, freight and logistics needs, with future development providing increased opportunities for living, jobs, investment and services.<sup>173</sup>

The suburbs of Cobblebank and Truganina have been identified as two places for the development of substantial employment precincts. In 2017, the planned town centre in Cobblebank was elevated to the largest centre in the municipality, comprising approximately 100 hectares and providing a diverse range of jobs, activities and housing, as well as a train station.<sup>174</sup>

The City of Melton recognises that, with this growth and development continuing into the future, thoughtful planning and sustainable practices are needed in order to retain the characteristics that make the city such a unique place to live, and to embrace the challenges that this level of growth inevitably brings. In 2018, the City of Melton reached a population of more than 150,000 people. It will continue to grow over the next 30 years to a predicted population of nearly 500,000 by 2051.<sup>175</sup> As it has grown, the city has become increasingly diverse, with more than 130 different nationalities represented by more than 40,000 migrants living in the City of Melton.<sup>176</sup> Most recent migration has been from African and Asian nations, including skilled migrants, refugees and family members of current residents.<sup>177</sup> Recognising this increased diversity, the City of Melton released an Intercultural Plan in 2017. This was established to embrace cultural diversity, as well as strengthen community participation, enhance organisational responsiveness and support leadership and advocacy for people of all cultural backgrounds.<sup>178</sup> The city was awarded membership of the Council of Europe’s Intercultural Cities program in 2018, becoming only the second local government authority in Australia to join the program.<sup>179</sup>

#### OPPOSITE

**The Taylors Hill Youth and Community Centre is one of many new facilities and services in the municipality that have been established to support young people in the community.**

Melton City Council

**The Western Business Accelerator and Centre of Excellence opened in 2015 as a community-driven business and enterprise hub.**

Melton City Council

1980-2018

# Melton Botanic Garden

With a deficit of open public spaces around Melton, the idea of a botanic garden had been floated for a number of years, and a report commissioned in 2003 by local Member of Parliament Don Nardella was a major step forward in making the garden a reality.<sup>180</sup> Since then, with the support of the City of Melton, a group of passionate community participants operating as the Friends of the Melton Botanic Garden have worked tirelessly to bring the vision for the garden to life. Over time, the Melton Botanic Garden has transformed a piece of sparse, unloved fringe land into a surprising and delightful oasis brimming with plant and bird life.

From its inception, the Melton Botanic Garden had a strong focus on native plants and their use by Indigenous people. The Koori Student Garden, Victorian Volcanic Plains Aboriginal Usage Garden and Bushfoods Garden feature a wide range of largely dryland plant species, some of which are indigenous to the area and some which are native to other parts of Australia. Many of these plants are well suited to the relatively low rainfall around Melton, which averages around just 400 millimetres per year.<sup>181</sup> These three gardens also highlight the myriad uses of native plants, which have been part of Aboriginal cultural knowledge over millennia. These days, the Melton Botanic Garden also focuses on significant non-indigenous botanical specimens, in distinctive and beautiful Southern African and Mediterranean plantings.

The Melton Botanic Garden includes examples of many tree species, including 250-year-old River Red Gums that edge Ryans Creek and the garden's small lake, and arboreta featuring Yellow Box and Grey Box specimens, among others. This rich mix of vegetation, as well as the creek and lakes present on the site, attract a large range of birdlife, including pelicans, honeyeaters, spoonbills, ducks, eagles and cormorants.<sup>182</sup>

The garden is maintained and cared for almost entirely through volunteer labour, with many different volunteer work teams allocated to attend to certain areas of the garden, and various community and school groups participating at different times. The Friends of the Melton Botanic Garden runs a calendar of talks, social events and field trips, and participates in horticultural festivals. Attached to the site is the Plant Nursery and Depot, which is the central base of the



garden's operations and also a place for visitors to purchase local plant species from enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff.<sup>183</sup>

One important role that the Melton Botanic Garden plays within the community is as a source of botanical information, via its online database. This index, accessible via the Friends of the Melton Botanic Garden's website, provides a wealth of invaluable facts and figures about the plants within the garden, and is just one example of the many ways the Melton Botanic Garden acts as a knowledge hub for the community. Through its dynamic database, events and enthusiastic volunteers, the garden encourages an appreciation for the environment, and gives the community the knowledge, skills and support to care for it.

The Melton Botanic Garden motto, 'Growing Plants, Growing People', reflects just how integral the people of Melton have been in bringing this marvellous place to life.<sup>184</sup> The garden is a unique endeavour that contributes much to the community, but also requires time, energy and pure passion from a committed group of people in order to survive. Let's hope that new generations of Meltonians will discover their own love for this very special place, so that it will thrive long into the future.

**The Melton Botanic Garden is a treasured oasis of plants, trees and birdlife, and is cared for almost entirely by a team of dedicated volunteers.**

Melton City Council





**The unique biodiversity remaining in the City of Melton today, following over 150 years of urban development, is now carefully protected.**

Melton City Council

**The innovative, award-winning, and environmentally-friendly Melton Library and Learning Hub opened in 2013.**

Melton City Council

The natural environment within which the City of Melton is situated today is unique in many ways and contains a number of rare and significant flora and fauna. Most of the municipality is located on the Victorian Volcanic Plains, with a small portion of the northern hills located on relatively intact Central Victorian Uplands. The Werribee River and Kororoit Creek, two of western Melbourne's most significant waterways, flow through the municipality. The Western (Basalt) Plains Grassland, Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands and the Grey Box Woodlands are ecosystems of state and national significance. Rare or threatened flora and fauna in the City of Melton include Button Wrinklewort, Small Milkwort, Spiny Rice-flower, Blue-billed Duck, Striped Legless Lizard, Golden Sun Moth and Growling Grass Frog.<sup>185</sup> Over 150 years of urban development and clearing has led to less than 1 per cent of native vegetation remaining in the City of Melton, and making the remaining biodiversity of particular significance.<sup>186</sup>

Water and fire have been constant concerns for residents, and with the potentially catastrophic impacts of climate change, environmental challenges are only going to increase into the future. The City of Melton is tackling all of these issues head on with a number of green initiatives, including: rate rebates for rural landowners to improve the environmental condition of their land; free energy and information advice, as well as the offer of home energy assessments, to help residents to live more sustainably; and the launch of the city's Environment Plan 2017–2027.<sup>187</sup> The first of its kind for the municipality, the Environment Plan examines current environmental and conservation action undertaken by the city to preserve the unique natural surrounding environment. It outlines a plan for the next ten years to ensure the preservation of these lands for future generations.<sup>188</sup> Melton City Council won two awards at the 2017 Keep Victoria Beautiful Sustainable City Awards and was highly commended in two other categories. Eynesbury resident Chris Lunardi was the recipient of the Dame Phyllis Frost Award and two community groups – Eynesbury Environment Group and Utsav Malayalee Samaj – were both highly commended in separate categories at the same awards ceremony.<sup>189</sup> The City of Melton has been a regular award-winner at the Sustainable City Awards since 2007.<sup>190</sup> The new Melton Library and Learning Hub, which opened in 2013 on McKenzie Street, demonstrates outstanding environmentally sustainable design. It became the first library in Australia to be awarded a five star Public Building Design rating in the Green Building Council of Australia's Green Star rating system.<sup>191</sup>

In 1998, Melton Shire Council established the Shire of Melton Education Board, comprising Council representatives, education providers and community representatives. The board



subsequently developed a Community Education Plan, the first of its kind in Victoria, outlining a strategy to establish a local culture where education is seen as critical for both individual and community advancement. The aim of the plan was to foster 'whole of life' education opportunities for all residents in the shire, from pre-school through to older residents. In 2004 the board changed its name to the Shire of Melton Community Learning Board to more accurately reflect its role and intent. This endeavour culminated in Melton being internationally recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as a learning city in 2015, the first in Australia.<sup>192</sup>

### The story continues

The City of Melton has not forgotten its relationship with Melbourne's western suburbs. With Melbourne's population predicted to reach 8 million by 2051, and the western suburbs likely to see the majority of that growth in accordance with the West Growth Corridor Plan, the necessity to examine the needs of the west is just as crucial as ever. The City of Melton was one of several



**The Melton Town Centre Redevelopment Project began in 2015 to transform the streetscape into a safe, vibrant and accessible public space. It is expected to be completed in December 2018.**

Melton City Council

**LEFT**  
**Rainbow flags flying proudly in Caroline Springs to promote the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT).**

Melton City Council



OPPOSITE

**In the face of continued growth and change, the Melton community is strong in civic pride as it looks towards a bright future.**

Melton City Council

representatives from local government, Victoria University and City West Water who joined the LeadWest lobby group to present a list of initiatives to the federal government for funding in 2017. Projects proposed by the lobby group included an airport rail link from Tullamarine to the CBD; a freight strategy, involving trains to reduce western Melbourne's reliance on trucks; and energy projects including a solar-powered grid in Sunshine and waste-to-energy facility in Wyndham.<sup>193</sup>

In 2016 Melton City Council invited community members to contribute their visions for the city over the next 20 years. 'Melton City 2036' received contributions from more than 2000 residents who shared what they loved about living in the City of Melton, what they disliked and what they hoped for the future. This community feedback will be used to inform the future direction and vision for the City of Melton.<sup>194</sup> The Melton City Council and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2021 also outlines the ways in which the council will strive towards building a thriving community where everyone belongs.<sup>195</sup>

There is no doubt that the story is far from over for the City of Melton. The growth of Melbourne's west, especially the City of Melton, only continues. The history of the city demonstrates that while each decade has brought forth its own unique challenges and change, the one constant theme throughout has been that of continual growth and development. With each new era, the community grew and shifted, and its needs changed. But as new neighbourhoods appeared and new challenges arose, the council, community and individuals within the municipality, rose to meet them. The City of Melton today may be a far cry from the sleepy country town many of its older residents remember fondly. However, careful planning and community commitment has ensured that the rural feel and many of the unique environmental features that so characterised those days of early development, still remain today.

Residents of the City of Melton are hopeful for the future. When asked about their visions for the city in 2036, young Meltonians responded positively. One 12-year-old commented that when she grows up she wants Melton to be 'a beautiful, safe place, clean and happy'. Another optimistic young resident added that he hoped Melton would be 'the capital of Victoria' when he grew up. One 10-year-old said she wanted 'a peaceful place with everyone being friends' and another student was hopeful that 'in 20 years time Melton will be somewhere everyone will be proud to live'.<sup>196</sup> With continued care, thoughtful development and community commitment, Melton is sure to become a city for the future.



1980-2018



**Melton City Councillors, 2018.**

**Back row, left to right:**

**Goran Kesic (Councillor 2016-current), Ken Hardy (Councillor 2016-current; Deputy Mayor 2017-2018),  
Melissa De Santis (Councillor 2016-current), Steven Abboushi (Councillor 2016-current).**

**Front row, left to right: Michelle Mendes (Councillor 2016-current), Sophie Ramsey (Councillor  
2001-current; Mayor 2002-2003, 2004-2005, 2014-2015, 2016-2017; Deputy Mayor 2013-2014),**

**Bob Turner (Councillor 2008-current; Mayor 2013-2014, 2017-2018; Deputy Mayor 2012-2013, 2016-2017),  
Lara Carli (Councillor 2012-current), Kathy Majdlik (Councillor 2008-current; Mayor 2012-2013, 2015-2016;  
Deputy Mayor 2008-2009, 2009-2010).**



# Appendix

## MAYORS AND SHIRE PRESIDENTS

### Melton Road Board Presidents

The Melton Road District was constituted on 1 September 1862.

A. Macintosh	1862-1863
A. Macintosh	1863-1864
A. Macintosh	1864-1865
A. Macintosh	1865-1866
S. Staughton	1866-1867
B. C. Porter	1867-1868
B. C. Porter	1868-1869
B. C. Porter	1869-1870

### Shire of Melton Presidents

The Shire of Melton was constituted on 14 March 1871.

A. Blackwood	1870-1871
N. Browne	1871-1872
N. I. Clarke	1872-1873
H. Beattie	1873-1874
H. W. Staughton	1874-1875
B. C. Porter	1875-1876
R. Parkinson	1876-1877
B. C. Porter	1877-1878
H. Beattie	1878-1879
R. Manning	1879-1880
M. Bourke	1880-1881
J. Murphy	1881-1882
R. Hornbuckle	1882-1883
H. W. Staughton	1883-1884
S. McCorkell	1884-1885
R. F. Kurrle	1885-1886

R. Parkinson	1886-1887
J. White	1887-1888
H. Beattie	1888-1889
A. Thompson	1889-1890
H. Beattie	1890-1891
J. T. Johnston	1891-1892
J. White	1892-1893
J. White	1893-1894
H. Beattie	1894-1895
H. Beattie	1895-1896
R. Hornbuckle	1896-1897
R. Hornbuckle	1897-1898
J. S. White	1898-1899
F. Bubeck	1899-1900
W. Robinson	1900-1901
H. Beattie	1901-1902
G. Lock	1902-1903
P. Atley	1903-1904
M. McPherson	1904-1905
E. C. Kinnersley	1905-1906
E. C. Kinnersley / W. Robinson	1906-1907
R. Hornbuckle	1907-1908
J. Anderson	1908-1909
W. Robinson	1909-1910
H. Hurley	1910-1911
F. Bubeck	1911-1912
J. F. Minns	1912-1913
J. T. Greene	1913-1914
T. Robinson	1914-1915
W. Browne	1915-1916
J. N. Howell	1916-1917
J. N. Howell	1917-1918

F. C. T. Holden	1918-1919
T. Hornbuckle	1919-1920
I. Robinson	1920-1921
H. G. Townsing	1921-1922
J. Greig	1922-1923
J. F. Minns	1923-1924
I. Robinson	1924-1925
J. Knox	1925-1926
F. C. T. Holden	1926-1927
J. Knox	1927-1928
W. Leake	1928-1929
J. F. Hornbuckle	1929-1930
W. J. O'Brien	1930-1931
A. E. Minns	1931-1932
I. Robinson	1932-1933
J. Beaty	1933-1934
J. R. Wallace	1934-1935
G. Coburn	1935-1936
H. G. Townsing	1936-1937
W. Leake	1937-1938
G. E. Robinson	1938-1939
W. J. O'Brien	1939-1940
J. R. Wallace	1940-1941
G. E. Robinson	1941-1942
J. Beaty	1942-1943
T. L. Barrie	1943-1944
G. Robinson	1944-1945
A. W. Condie	1945-1946
W. Leake	1946-1947
G. E. Robinson	1947-1948
J. Beaty	1948-1949
J. R. Wallace	1949-1950
F. H. Lang	1950-1951
J. Beaty	1951-1952
W. A. Lewis	1952-1953
G. Robinson	1953-1954
R. B. Watson	1954-1955
J. R. Wallace	1955-1956
G. E. Robinson	1956-1957
J. Beaty	1957-1958
T. L. Barrie	1958-1959
E. R. Jongebloed	1959-1960

J. Beaty	1960-1961
J. R. Wallace	1961-1962
T. H. Fogarty	1962-1963
T. H. Fogarty	1963-1964
T. L. Barrie	1964-1965
A. D. Slocombe	1965-1966
F. Millett	1966-1967
A. R. Garlick	1967-1968
J. T. Robinson	1968-1969
A. D. Slocombe	1969-1970
J. L. Pryor	1970-1971
A. E. Missen	1971-1972
E. W. Gillespie	1972-1973
J. S. Shugg	1973-1974
J. T. Robinson	1974-1975
I. Richards	1975-1976
B. T. Davies	1976-1977
A. E. Missen	1977-1978
J. A. Eden	1978-1979
G. Bilszta	1979-1980
G. Bilszta	1980-1981
M. F. Peacock	1981-1982
M. F. Peacock	1982-1983
M. J. Dann / T. M. Samson	1983-1984
T. M. Samson	1984-1985
T. M. Samson	1985-1986
M. A. Wood	1986-1987
M. A. Wood	1987-1988
V. Weaver	1988-1989

#### Shire of Melton Mayors

The title Shire President was changed to Mayor in 1989 by a Local Government Act.

J. McElroy	1989-1990
G. M. Withington	1990-1991
M. D. Bowman / M. A. Wood	1991-1992
M. A. Kilgariff	1992-1993
R. L. Russell	1993-1994
R. L. Russell	1994

#### Shire of Melton Commissioners

On 15 December 1994, three commissioners were appointed to administer the Shire of Melton as part of the state government's restructure of local government.

A. Fraser - Chair of Commissioners	1994-2001
J. Hyett - Commissioner	1994-2001
B. Morison - Commissioner	1994-2001

The commissioners' term ended on 13 October 2001 by an Act of Parliament.

#### Shire of Melton Mayors

C. B. Watson	2001-2002
S. Ramsey	2002-2003
G. P. Stock / R. J. Gough	2003-2004
S. Ramsey	2004-2005
C. E. Papas	2005-2006
J. N. Mammarella	2006-2007
B. Rowan	2007-2008
R. Cugliari	2008-2009
J. N. Mammarella	2009-2010
J. N. Mammarella	2010-2011
J. N. Mammarella	2011-2012

#### City of Melton Mayors

The Shire of Melton was reconstituted as the City of Melton on 6 September 2012.

K. Majdlik	2012-2013
B. Turner	2013-2014
S. Ramsey	2014-2015
K. Majdlik	2015-2016
S. Ramsey	2016-2017
B. Turner	2017-2018

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Christ Church

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Houdini

Lang family

Robert Macdonald

Jimmy Melrose

Melton Bowls Club

Melton Golf Course

Melton history - general

Melton Shire Council

Ogden family

Postal services

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Royal Historical Society of Victoria

Wendy Barrie private collection

### **Individual contributions**

*Personal communication*

Wendy Barrie

Jill and John Bentley

Georgina Borg

Bernard Coburn

Kevin Condon

Mary Dodemaide (née Carl)

Melva Hirt

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*Growth, Progress and Community Spirit* traces the history of the Melton district from Dreamtime to today. Beginning with the formation of the land, it covers tens of thousands of years of habitation by First Nations people, the arrival of European settlers, and the incredible transformation from a small farming community to one of Australia's fastest growing cities.

This history explores the changes and challenges faced throughout this journey, and shows how the community has risen to meet them. Archival records and photographs are combined with the memories and reflections of locals to illuminate the past and pay homage to those who have shaped this thriving municipality, while also looking to the future.

*Growth, Progress and Community Spirit* celebrates the Melton community, past and present, its diversity, unique character and vibrant spirit.

Lucy Bracey, Fiona Poulton and Ellen Spalding are part of Way Back When Consulting Historians, a team of professional historians who work with communities to explore and give voice to the past.

**Cover image:** Melton Mechanics' Institute, 1912 and 2018.

Photographs courtesy Melton & District Historical Society and Melton City Council.

**Endpapers:** Township of Melton map, 1863.

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