

# Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated 17/01/18

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## FORMER SMITHS NURSERY



h00070 h0070 riddells creek nursery



12476\_Former\_Smiths\_Nursery\_Riddells\_Creek\_HV\_\_200216.jpg



h00070 h0070 riddellscreeknursery white oak



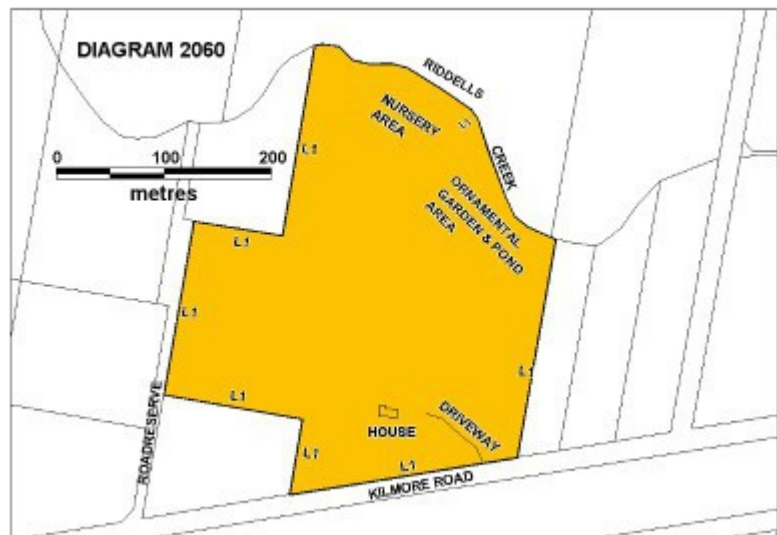
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her2002 000056 smiths nursery plan

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## Location

721 KILMORE ROAD RIDDELLS CREEK, Macedon Ranges Shire

## Municipality

MACEDON RANGES SHIRE

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2060

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO82

## VHR Registration

April 14, 2011

## Heritage Listing

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is significant?

Smiths Nursery, one of Victoria's earliest plant nurseries, was established in 1863 at Riddells Creek and consists of an area of land to the south of Riddells Creek with the remains of nursery rows, a display garden and pond, landscape features including a drive and paths, remnant brick walls that once formed the base of the propagating house, remains of a stone building of unidentified use and archaeological features associated with nursery use of the site.

John Smith trained as a professional horticulturist in Edinburgh and London, and worked at the Fairfield Nurseries near Liverpool. He came to Victoria in 1852 and managed the Smith and Adamson Nursery in South Yarra. Smith and his sons founded their nursery on the banks of Riddells Creek, about 50 km north west of Melbourne.

Initially the nursery made a name as a major supplier of fruit trees in Victoria, and maintained a leading position in this field. In the 1870s the nursery expanded into ornamental trees and plants, specialising in orchids and rhododendrons. An export trade in native plants and seeds was also developed. The nursery is credited with bringing the first Golden Oak (*Quercus robur* 'Concordia') to Australia. A specimen remains in the reserve near the bridge on Riddells Creek. The Variegated Elm (*Ulmus minor* 'Variegata') is also reputed to have been introduced by the nursery prior to 1900.

Following John's death in 1886, his sons Walter and Thomas continued the business. After Thomas's death in 1898, Walter and his sons ran the nursery until the early years of the twentieth century. Walter was particularly interested in bulbous plants and chrysanthemums. Half of the nursery site was sold in 1902. Floods in 1906 did major damage to the infrastructure of the nursery. Some time after the closure of the nursery, probably during the 1920s, a weatherboard house was constructed on the nursery site and used as a private residence through the mid-twentieth century.

Smiths Nursery is predated only by Charles Wyatt's Frogmore Nursery (H0696) at Fyansford which was established in 1858. Smiths obtained first prize for strawberries at the 1866 Intercolonial Exhibition in Melbourne and for Newtown Pippin apples at the 1875 Vienna International Exhibition. In 1876 the nursery was producing 12,000 apple trees on blight proof stock. They were amongst the earliest to specialise in oaks, conifers and rhododendrons which are essential for the establishment of cool climate gardens and are a dominant feature of the gardens at Mt Macedon which are now a popular destination for both locals and visitors to the area. Later in 1883 the Smiths specialised in orchids and listed 80 choice varieties, many new to the colony. Native trees, plants and seeds were sold to European and overseas buyers. Blue Gum seeds and tree ferns were consigned through Ferdinand von Mueller to buyers in Europe, including to the imperial gardens in St Petersburg and Vienna.

The nursery was based on the flats on the south side of a bend in Riddells Creek, upstream of the township. Mature deciduous trees, some in rows, remain in the original nursery area. The orchard was established on the slope between the location of the (later) 1920s weatherboard house and the creek. A landscaped garden was located just to the east, and ornamental plantings and traces of curving paths and a lily pond remain in this area.

At the main entrance to the property, the curving rock edged driveway to the 1920s weatherboard house was planted with ornamental trees and shrubs, some of which remain as mature specimens. These include several outstanding and rare plants, including a very large *Quercus robur*, 3 *Quercus agrifolia*, 3 *Quercus suber*, *Arbutus unedo*, 3 high grafted *Fraxinus excelsior* 'Aurea Pendula', *Araucaria bidwillii*, a stand of *Trachycarpus fortunei* and 2 *Livistona australis* palms. The 1920s weatherboard house is not itself considered to be of significance and, as of January 2011, is in a dilapidated condition.

The Former Smiths Nursery is on part of the traditional land of the Wurundjeri people.

How is it significant?

The Former Smiths Nursery Riddells Creek is of historical, archaeological and scientific (botanical) significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Former Smiths Nursery is of historical and archaeological significance as the second oldest known plant nursery in Victoria with substantial remaining physical evidence. Smiths Nursery includes plantings and the remains of nursery rows, landscape and archaeological features, including drive, paths, stone building and brick propagating house remains, display garden and pond. Archaeological material on the site demonstrate the early use of the site. There is potential for further archaeological investigation to reveal information about the early operation of the nursery and mid-century nursery practice in Victoria.

The Former Smiths Nursery is of historical significance for its role in the development of the fruit and horticultural industry in Victoria.

The Former Smiths Nursery is of historical significance for its early involvement in the trade in Australian native plants and trees, both cultivated and existing plants, sourced from the slopes of Mt Macedon.

The Former Smiths Nursery is of scientific (horticultural) significance for its collection of rare plants.

## Permit Exemptions

General Conditions: 1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object. General Conditions: 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and the Executive Director shall be notified as soon as possible. Note: All archaeological places have the potential to contain significant sub-surface artefacts and other remains. It will be necessary to obtain approval from Heritage Victoria before the undertaking of any works that have a significant sub-surface component. General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan approved by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: The existence of a Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan endorsed by Heritage Victoria provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan. General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions. General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable.

Landscape Maintenance :

- \* Repairs, conservation, and maintenance to hard landscape features and structures, steps, paths and gutters, drainage and irrigation systems, edging, fences and gates.
- \* The process of gardening, mowing, hedge clipping, bedding displays, removal of dead nursery and ornamental plants and replanting same species, disease, vermin and weed control, emergency and safety works and minor landscaping works to maintain the landscape.
- \* Removal of dead and dangerous trees provided a tree report and plan is submitted to the Executive Director for approval.
- \* The replanting of tree species to conserve the landscape character, conifer, elm, oak, palm and shrub plantings provided a list and plan is submitted to the Executive Director for approval.
- \* Management of trees in accordance with Australian Standard: Pruning of amenity trees AS 4373.
- \* Management of trees in accordance with Australian Standard: Protection of trees on development sites AS 4970.
- \* Removal of plants listed as Prohibited and Controlled Weeds in the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994.
- \* Removal of vegetation, fallen timber and fuel reduction as part of an agreed Fire Management Plan. Note that the Vegetation Clearance amendment VC61 (known as the 10/30 rule) does not apply to places on the VHR and a permit is required from the Executive Director.
- \* Vegetation protection and management of the possum and rabbit population.

Minor Works : Note: Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works should submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit

is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted.

### **The 1920s Weatherboard House:**

\* A person proposing to do works on the house should submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that works to the house will not adversely affect any landscape and archaeological features in the vicinity of the house and drive, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit.

## **Theme**

### 1. Shaping Victoria's environment

Heritage Act Categories Heritage place, Archaeological place,

Other Names RIDDELLS CREEK NURSERY, SMITH'S NURSERY,

Hermes Number 12476

Property Number

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## **History**

### PLACE HISTORY

The Former Smith's Nursery site was one of a number of freeholds created from the original Crown Allotment 19A on the south side of Riddells Creek in the 1860s. Allotment 19A was the site of a tent town during the construction of the railway in 1859. (BDA Planners p.300) One of these, E19, later became part of Smiths Nursery (TBA Planners p.300).

John Smith of Liverpool trained as a horticulturalist in Edinburgh and London . (TBA Planners p.300) He migrated to Australia with his family in 1858 (TBA Planners p.301). After leaving the firm of nurserymen, Smith and Adamson. he founded the nursery at Riddells Creek with his two sons in 1863 (Goss, 1983, p, 262)

The nursery specialised initially in fruit trees and built its reputation on them. Their advertisements in local newspapers showed 10,000 trees for sale, which had been brought from Were's nursery in Adelaide (Hutton, p.19). In 1866 it won the first prize in the Intercolonial Exhibition in Melbourne for strawberries. An *Australasian* article of 1969 stated that the firm had done more towards the cultivation and reliable nomenclature of hardy fruits than all the horticultural societies in Victoria put together. An 1875 prize at the International Exhibition in Vienna was for the apple "Newton Wonder". At this time the nursery was working with 20,000 apple trees on 'blight proof' stock. (Gilfedder, p.20, TBA Planners p.301).

Goss (1983, p. 63-4) quotes a catalogue of June 1883: 'the leading feature at Riddells Creek Nursery is the collection of fruit trees, The soil, site and climate together are favourable to the production of vigorous, healthy trees.'

In the next few years the nursery increased its range, dealing in soft fruits, bulbs, azaleas, rhododendrons, greenhouse plants and orchids (Gilfedder, 1994, p.20) The same catalogue describes the extensive list of orchids ( a general list of 53 varieties and 80 choice varieties) and azaleas as well as other ornamental species. The nursery won a number of horticultural prizes for its fruit stock.

The nursery may have collected Australian tree and plant seeds for export, and there may well have been a connection between the Smiths and Baron von Mueller in this regard. TBA Planners suggest that Smith collected seeds for von Mueller, as did his son Walter. The source for this information is Maroske, Mueller Correspondence Project Pers, Communication. Pescott , on the basis of interviews with Walter Smith, states that Smith and Sons were responsible for collections of Australian trees and plant seeds that von Mueller sent overseas, particularly to Italy, for the reclamation of malarial swamps(Pescott, 1940, p.15, Polya p.66)

Hutton (1981, p. 19) however was unable to corroborate this and doubts the connection between Smith and the

draining of the Pontine Marsh as Walter Smith claimed'

Two transcripts of letter from von Mueller sourced through the Mueller Correspondence Project which were provided with the nomination (HV file HER/2002/000056) show that Smith and Sons did participate with von Mueller in a trade in 'large 'ferntrees" from the gullies of Mount Macedon, One letter of 1871 addressed to Joseph Hooker of the RBG at Kew, and describes the shipping of a "monster-fern *Todea Africana*" procured from a gully on Mt Macedon by Messrs Smith of Riddell Creek. He also alludes to earlier work of this type by the Smiths at von Mueller's request. The second letter of 1873 is addressed to James Casey, the Minister for Lands, and refers to an account for "six very large ferntrees" acquired for the Dutch government by Smith and Sons'. Tree ferns were also exported to the Imperial Gardens at St Petersburg, and for the Winter Palace Gardens at Moscow, the garden of the Emperor at Vienna, the Royal Gardens at Edinburgh as well as gardens in New England and New York. (Gilfedder, 1994, p.20)

Smith & Sons are reported to have been responsible for the introduction to Victoria of the rare Golden Oak (*Quercus robur 'Concordia'*) and Silver (or Variagated) Elm (*Ulmus minor 'Variegata'*) to Australia. (Pescott, unpublished manuscript, p. 31 in Polya, p.66). Of the first batch only two survived the sea from England. One was given to the Royal Botanic Gardens, the fate of which is unknown and the other is on the banks of Riddell's Creek ((Gilfedder, 1994, p.20). A specimen of the Silver Elm at the National Herbarium sourced from 'the nursery of W. Smith at Riddell Creek' is dated 1900 (Spencer et al., 1991, p.20) A good specimen is located on Riddell's Creek at the triangular reserve which is approximately 200 m to the west of the nursery across the intersection of the creek and the Gisborne-Kilmore road.

John Smith senior died in 1886 at the age of 84 and his wife died a few years later. Two sons had already died, but the remaining sons, Walter and Thomas, continued to run the nursery (Hutton, p.20, Goss, p.62) Walter published a catalogue in 1891 (although no copies are known to survive) and the same year he set up the first Royal Horticultural Society bulb show in Melbourne with George Titheridge, a Coburg nurseryman (TBA Planners, p.301). Some photographs of the nursery and residence areas from across the creek remain from this period. The nursery activities show along the creek with an open area in front of the house and driveway where mature trees are visible. A flood in 1906 damaged the nursery and in particular the hothouse and other buildings (Hutton, p. 20, CFA Riddells Creek website)

Thomas was a high-profile local citizen, a member of the Gisborne Shire Council and a representative on the Riddells Creek Waterworks Trust. He was an active participant in the Riddell's Creek Dramatic Club (Hutton, p.2) and a frequent contributor of letters to the local newspaper (Gilfedder, p.20) He died on 1898 (Goss, p.62). In 1902 Walter sold half of the nursery. His two sons ran the remainder but it was only in business for a short while and then closed. These may have been the Walter John and John Daniel who appear in the 1915 rate books, Walter with 24 acres along the creek and John with 3 acres on the road frontage (TBA Planners, p. 301) A 1923 photograph show the extensive lily pond with mature trees behind (Goss, p.62). Rate books show Smith descendents continuing to live on the property until 1945 (Gilfedder, p.20).

Foster, John (1989) *Victorian Picturesque: the Colonial Gardens of William Sangster*.

Gilfedder, Francine (1994) "Sowing the Seeds: the Early Nursery Industry in the Macedon Ranges" in *The Changing Landscape: The Garden in the Landscape: Proceedings of Australian Garden History Society Conference*, 15th, Melbourne, 1994. pp/ 18-21.

Goss, Robyn (1983) *Riddell's Village: Reminiscences of Earlier Riddell's Creek*. Saintcrespin Publishing,

Haynes, Estelle (1993) 'A Study of Selected Nineteenth Century Nurserymen and the Sites They Operated From'. Melbourne, National Trust of Australia (Victoria). Unpublished report.

Hutton, H.B. (1981)'Two Nurseries in the Mount Macedon Area: John Smith & Sons and Taylor & Sangster" *Australian Garden History Society Journal* No. 2 , pp.19-21

Pescott, Edward E. (1940) 'The Pioneers of Horticulture in Victoria', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, vol. 18, no. 1. February 1940, pp. 1-32.

Polya, R. (Rosemary) (1981) I. La Trobe University Library Publication No.24. Bundoora, Vic.

Spencer, R, Hawker, J and Lumley, P. (1991) *Elms in Victoria*, Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne, Vic.

TBA Planners, (1994) *Macedon Ranges Cultural Heritage and Landscape Study*, vol.4 Pt 2. Significant Individual Buildings and Sites, Trevor Budge and Associates, Bendigo, pp. 299-3-3.

## Assessment Against Criteria

a. Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history

Smith's Nursery is of historical and archaeological significance as the second oldest known plant nursery in Victoria.

Smith's Nursery is of historical significance for its role in the development of the fruit and horticultural industry in Victoria.

Smith's Nursery is of historical significance for its early involvement in the trade in Australian natives, both cultivated and existing plants sourced from the slopes of Mt Macedon

b. Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

Smith's Nursery is of scientific (horticultural) significance for several outstanding and rare plants, including a rare and very large *Quercus aff. alba*, *Quercus coccifera*, 3 *Quercus suber*, *Arbutus unedo*, 2 high grafted *Fraxinus excelsior* 'Aurea Pendula', *Araucaria bidwillii*, a stand of *Trachycarpus fortunei* and a *Livistona australis* palm.

c. Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.

Smith's Nursery has the potential for further archaeological investigation to reveal information about the early operation of the nursery.

d. Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or objects.

e. Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

f. Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

g. Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.

h. Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

## Plaque Citation

Former Smiths Nursery

Founded in 1863, the second oldest known plant nursery in Victoria retains plantings, drive, paths, remains of stone building and brick propagating house, display garden and pond, demonstrating the early use of the site.

34/186

## Extent of Registration

1. All of the land, including landscape and archaeological features, marked L1 on Diagram 2060 held by the Executive Director

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*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 1995. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place data owner.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*