

SPRINGWOOD HOMESTEAD COMPLEX



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan garden
elevation 2050



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan garden
front 2055



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan gable
detail 2051



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan entrance
2049



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan 2047



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan garden
front 2054



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan 2048



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan old
photo 2061



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan rear
2056



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan rear
cottage 2052



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan split
timber outbuilding 2072



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan stables
2071



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan stone
cottage 2063



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan stone
cottage 2064



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan stone
cottage extension 2070



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan stone
cottage interior 2066



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan stone
cottage interior 2068



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan stone
cottage interior 2069



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan stone
cottage rear 2065



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan
watercolour 2058



23205 Springwood
Homestead Wannan window
detail 2057



23205 Springwood Homestead Wannan subdivision map 2059



23205 Springwood Homestead Wannan subdivision map 2060



23205 Springwood Homestead Wannan subdivision map 2062

Location

Brung Brungle Road, WANNON VIC 3301 - Property No 002

Municipality

SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE

Level of significance

Stage 2 study complete

Heritage Listing

Southern Grampians Shire

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - July 15, 2003

What is Significant?

The Springwood Homestead complex began as the squatting run, Bongmire, which was occupied by the Tulloh family. The run was forfeited because of Superintendent La Trobe's disfavour with the Tullohs over their treatment of Aborigines and of their Irish servants. The oldest building in the complex, a stone cottage dates from the Tulloh occupation and may date from the 1840s. It survives well, although altered and extended. Stephen George Henty and William Learmonth, both very significant early squatters then held the Bongmire lease until May 1859. For a very brief period about 1858 Robert and Annie Baxter Dawbin occupied Bongmire with a view to purchase. She became a famous nineteenth-century author. In her journal she describes the cottage's inappropriate situation and the squalid condition of the servants. The Henty and Learmonth families were close friends and supporters of Annie Baxter. William Cockburn Mercer (also known as Messer) took up Bongmire, purchased the Pre-emptive Right in 1860, built the present homestead and established the garden. The main house is a picturesque assemblage of parts linked by its architectural detailing and by a verandah on two sides. The garden, the orchard, kitchen garden, and the parkland beyond also evolved along picturesque lines with views from the house reaching out and claiming the landscape metaphorically. Another cottage, typical outbuildings, a coach-house and stables, and the 1908 woolshed complete the complex. Mercer became a very substantial landowner after 1860 holding neighbouring Kanawalla and Nigretta, as well. The whole estate was sold up after his death in 1907, but his descendants still occupy the property, now known as Springwood, one of the longer occupations in the Western District. Alexander Mercer altered the main house and garden in the 1920s but the whole complex remains substantially intact, including the interiors, contents and records of the main house, which is in excellent condition.

How is it Significant?

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

Why is it significant?

The Springwood Homestead complex is of historical significance as an early squatting run. Its connections with early squatters including the Tulloh family, Stephen George Henty and William Learmonth, Robert and Annie Baxter Dawbin, and then from 1859, William Cockburn Mercer (or Messer) and his descendants demonstrate an important sequence of occupation. The original cottage is a rare example of early homesteads made more important because of its description in the journal of Annie Baxter. The later homestead complex is significant as the principle seat of the Mercer family in the past and presently.

The Springwood Homestead complex is of architectural significance for its surviving first homestead, the second homestead with its various accretions and for its setting in a substantial garden and parkland overlooking the Wannon River valley.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Southern Grampians - Southern Grampians Shire Heritage Study, Timothy Hubbard P/L, Annabel Neylon, 2002;
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	BONGMIRE,
Hermes Number	23205
Property Number	

Physical Conditions

The main house, the 1937 cottage, the outbuildings, the coach house and stables, the woolshed and the garden are all in good condition. The original stone cottage and its extensions are in fair condition.

Physical Description 1

The main house at Springwood is made up of several major parts reflecting three main periods. The development is shown in the fabric of the building and in documents such as old photographs and a watercolour held at the house. The exact dates and sequence of development are not certain, however.

The simplest and probably the oldest part is the gabled section now used as the kitchen wing and comprising several rooms. This appears to be constructed of brick but may be stone and has been rendered. The gable roof, aligned north to south, is now corrugated iron and appears to have been modified in the early twentieth century. Originally, two hips possibly covered this wing. The floor level is slightly higher than the adjacent parts of the house. The windows are unusual being double-hung sashes, not counterweighted, and divided into six panes by a thick central mullion and horizontally by thin glazing bars. The kitchen wing has been extended on the western side.

Adjacent to the kitchen wing there is a perpendicular wing including the present dining room and further rooms. A short flight of steps leads up from the dining room into the kitchen wing. This wing is still roofed by the original hip roof but it has been integrated into the newer kitchen roof. This wing is built of brick with stone quoins. The windows are double hung sashes. There is a timber verandah on the north (or rear), the east (or garden) and part of the south sides of this wing. The verandah is simply detailed with a pierced frieze, quadrant brackets and posts with basic capitals and bases. Part of the verandah on the north side has been enclosed and is now used as a bathroom. This wing may date from the same time as the front wing.

Perhaps the second wing to be built runs parallel to the dining room wing and incorporates a transverse passage, two rooms, one of which is used as a library, and a central hall. It is still roofed by the original gable roof, which straddles the transverse passage as well as the rooms, and is relatively shallow in its pitch. Part of the roof is still covered with slates. A timber verandah with cast iron decoration has been added on the west (or drive) side. There are doors from the passage onto the west and east verandahs. The gables of this wing are cement rendered and carefully detailed in the Italianate style with decorated bargeboards, an oeil-de-boeuf ventilator and a simple cornice to create a tympanum. The roof purlins are exposed in the eaves. The gables are terminated by timber finials. The walls of this wing are face brick.

The front wing appears to have been the last to be added. It too is loosely Italianate in style. It was originally under a hip roof but this was replaced in the early twentieth century by a gable roof with wider eaves and a new gablet over the front door. The gables of this wing are treated as plain half-timbering and have rectangular louvered ventilators. This wing includes two principle rooms either side of the central hall. The east room has a polygonal bay window, the roof of which may be original. The west room has a simple double hung sash window, a reproduction of the original windows, which had been removed when the opening was closed. The facade is symmetrical about the front door with a pair of triple-light double hung sashes. Smooth Tuscan 'piers' support an arch of vermiculated voussoirs. These are made from cement render and match the quoins and voussoirs of the adjacent windows. The front entrance is treated as a slightly projecting porch with the door recessed. The front door has leadlight typical of the early twentieth century. The chimneys of this wing are opposite the facade suggesting that they replaced windows if the south face of the library wing was once the facade. The east verandah continues across this side elevation and incorporates a polygonal bay to accommodate the bay window.

Immediately behind the main house there is a small, asymmetrical cottage in the Italianate style. This is built from limestone blocks dressed as ashlar. It has roughcast render in the gables and a simple timber verandah. The windows are double hung sashes. It is said to date from 1937. An earlier cottage appears to have existed in the same position according to the watercolour of the property kept at Springwood.

On the west side of the drive there is a meat house of split weatherboards. It has trellis ventilators in the gables of the roof. The roof is covered in corrugated iron laid horizontally. There are other minor works in the garden and other areas around the house. Beyond the homestead garden there is a conventional timber coach-house and stables.

Some distance beyond the stables and on the other side of the drive, there is a stone cottage. This is almost certainly the original homestead and may date in part to the 1840s. The cottage is located close to edge of the valley and looks towards the east. It is symmetrical and single storey and comprises one large room since subdivided by a modern partition. The ceiling is lined with boards, which also line the top of the walls. Otherwise the walls are rough and just painted. The ceiling may be a later alteration. The stone is roughly coursed rubble, which appears to be fieldstone. The roof is hipped and covered with corrugated iron. The windows of this section are now missing but appear to have been casements. There is a large chimney at the northern end formerly used for cooking. It is stone below the eaves line and brick above having been extended. Part of the base has been rendered, perhaps to combat rising damp. A timber wing has been added to the front of the stone cottage. It is longer and wider and has a projecting room on the north side. The windows are twelve paned double hung sashes without counterweights. The roof is gabled in two directions and covered with corrugated iron. A small timber porch has been added at the corner of front door. There is no evidence of an earlier verandah. The timber wing has brick chimneys on the north and south sides. The interiors are lined with painted lining boards, which presumably were covered with hessian and paper. Simple timber mantles survive internally. At the rear of the stone cottage there is what appears to have been a detached timber kitchen or laundry. It is weatherboard, similar to the front extension and is linked to the cottage by a partly enclosed breezeway. The roof is a simple gable.

It seems clear that the main house has been sited on a rise to take advantage of the views across the Wannon River valley. Its plan has developed to create two, if not three, principle elevations. The view from the house to the east or garden side is important because it is the same view enjoyed by the original cottage. The view to the south is also important and this forms the main approach along a winding drive. The current planting, and possibly earlier schemes, enhances the sense of anticipation of arrival along the drive. Tall, mature trees still form a backdrop to the house. The siting and setting of the house follow the well-established principles of the Picturesque aesthetic.

The garden at Springwood is a large roughly oval shaped area of about one hectare with some parts dating from 1870 or earlier. The garden is set close around the homestead, with mature trees planted as shelter on the north west boundary, a large gravelled turning circle to the west of the homestead and densely planted shrubs around the eastern border of the homestead garden. There are also some very early specimen trees planted to the west and north west of the homestead, which may have been grown from seed and planted by William and Mary Mercer in the 1870s. Later plantings include European specimen trees and beds of perennials and shrubs planted adjacent to the homestead.

The garden can be divided into three sections: i) The western half, which has the majority of the historical botanic specimens and has retained much of its integrity; ii) The eastern part of the garden, associated with later developments and the mid to later nineteenth century, although the plantings have been much altered from the original, while the layout retains some degree of integrity; and iii) the orchard and former vegetable gardens, located immediately beyond the eastern border of the garden.

An undated watercolour of Springwood, perhaps painted around the turn of the century shows a substantial vegetable garden and orchard extending down the hillside from the homestead garden, defined by a picket fence. Although the orchard remains in a much reduced state, the only physical evidence of the vegetable garden is a large area of disturbed earth, some of which shows the hummocks where beds were located. The orchard is in fair condition, and contains a variety of species of Apples (*Malus* sp.), Pear (*Pyrus* sp.), Crabapple (*Malus x domestica*), Fig (*Ficus carica*) and Black Mulberry (*Morus nigra*). The watercolour also shows a small wooden gate connecting the homestead and subsistence gardens, set into the fence dividing the two. Although the vegetable garden no longer exists, and the orchard is no longer connected with the homestead garden, the gate remains in a newer fence. The original gate serves as a reminder of a previous way of life, and a previous use of the land below. The self-sufficient as well as the ornamental component of the setting contribute to an understanding of the homestead as a complex.

The garden does not appear to have been laid out by a professional designer or architect. The structure is simple and the plantings are relatively common species, known to be available in the nursery trade between 1874-1900. The Mercer (or Messer) family members are likely to have established the gardens with help from gardeners or labourers. The diary of A. A. C Mercer lists a number of seeds, which he had obtained, planted and grown at Bongmire (Springwood) in the 1870s. These included Peppercorn (written "Pepper") (*Schinus molle*); Red and Purple Flowering Gums, written "Red and Purple Flowering Ficulifolia" (*Corymbia ficifolia*); Tree Lucerne

(*Chamaecytisus palmensis*), an unknown *Hakea* sp., written "Haikaea"; Box Thorn written "African Box Thorn" (*Lycium barberum*?); Canary Island Pine (*Pinus canariensis*); Sugar Pine written "Lambertiana" (*Pinus lambertiana*); White Cypress Pine (*Callytris glaucophylla*); an unknown *Laburnum* species; Kurrajong written "Currajong"; and (*Bachychiton populneum*) (Mercer). Some of these trees survive in the western part of the garden, including the Red Flowering Gum, Peppercorn, Canary Island Pine and Kurrajong. Other fine specimen trees planted around the turn of the century are also present in the western part of the garden. They include two excellent examples of Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) at the entrance gates to the homestead garden, two Deodar Cedar (*Cedrus deodara*), a Lillypilly (*Syzigium australe*), a *Cordyline australis* (Cabbage Tree), a fine example of a Portugal Laurel (*Prunus lusitanica*) and a substantial Silky Oak (*Grevillia robusta*).

There have been some major alterations to the topography of the garden, including the alteration of the main lawn in the eastern part of the garden, in front of the house. The lawn previously sloped gently towards the Wannan River, overlooking the orchard, vegetable gardens and river flats. Recent alterations have made the lawn extend horizontally from the house, ending in a sharp drop at the further most eastern edge of the homestead garden. This has altered the views from the house and front garden and the appreciation of the borrowed landscape beyond. The view is now toward the opposite side of valley, rather than extending down over the landscape towards the river. The tree line of the opposite plateau is now an important part of the borrowed landscape.

In the twentieth century, a variety of 'popular' plants have been added to the garden. These include the addition of several Wisterias (*Wisteria floribunda*) to the verandah on the eastern side of the house and to the entry to the house on the western side. It is likely that these were planted after 1945, although they may have replaced what had been planted before. A number of shrubs and perennials which have been planted immediately adjacent to the house probably date from the latter part of the nineteenth century, as do the Box hedges (*Buxus sempervirens*) which have been used to define spaces within the garden, and emphasise entry points. A number of European specimen trees also appear to have been planted in the latter twentieth century.

Historical Australian Themes

Theme 2: Peopling Australia

2.5 Promoting settlement

2.6 Fighting for land

2.6.1 Resisting the advent of European s and their animals

2.6.2 Displacing Indigenous people

Theme 3: Developing local, regional and national economies

3.5 Developing primary production

3.5.1 Grazing stock

3.5.2 Breeding animals

3.5.3 Developing agricultural industries

Theme 5: Working

5.8 working on the land

Usage/Former Usage

Continuing as a pastoral property

Integrity

Some alterations (not particularly sympathetic) in the 1920s when roofline was changed. Otherwise the main house is substantially intact internally and externally. All the other buildings are substantially intact to their historical period. The garden is intact to its mid-twentieth century condition.

Physical Description 2

Thomas Eady Tulloh, first leaseholder
S. G. Henty and William Learmonth, second leaseholders
William Cockburn Messer, third leaseholder
Mrs A. C. Mercer, founding member of the Napier Club, Hamilton

Physical Description 3

Bongmire Pre-emptive Right

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

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