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# GISBORNE MAINS HOMESTEAD SITE

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## Location

CALDER FREEWAY GISBORNE, MACEDON RANGES SHIRE

## Municipality

MACEDON RANGES SHIRE

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7822-0151

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is significant?

The Gisborne Mains Homestead Site is located near the junction of Brooking Road and the Calder Freeway. The original nine-roomed residence, wash house, underground cistern and garden appears to have been built in the period 1857-64 by Charles Hutton, a Gisborne businessman. The property was purchased in 1864 by Thomas and Agnes Watson and under their management became a prosperous stud farm. The Gisborne Mains Farm produced champion draught horses and sheep, and various farm products that won prestigious awards at the Royal Melbourne Show. The Watson family gained widespread praise from the surrounding farming community. Thomas Watson died in 1891 and Agnes in 1907. Under the management of the next generation of the Watson family, the role of raising stud stock and selling draught horses declined in favour of sheep farming, cattle and the production of fruits and dairy items. The residence remained virtually unaltered during the 100 years it belonged to the Watson family, except for renovations to first create and then upgrade a new kitchen. The existing garden with its hedge rows, exotic trees (including pines and palms) and orchard dates from the turn-of-the-century.

How is it significant?

Gisborne Mains Homestead Site is of historical and archaeological significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Gisborne Mains Homestead Site is historically significant as an archaeological relic of Victoria's late nineteenth century farming industry. From 1864, its owners, Thomas and Agnes Watson operated it as a prosperous stud farm making widely recognised contributions to development of agricultural and animal husbandry practices.

Gisborne Mains Homestead Site is of considerable archaeological significance due to the integrity and intactness of relics associated with the operation of the place as a stud farm under the management of Thomas and Agnes Watson. Of crucial significance is the known physical evidence of the residence, laundry, underground cistern and the potential for the area to contain undisturbed refuse tips containing artefact assemblages associated with late nineteenth century domestic and farming activities of Thomas and Agnes Watson. Contributing to the significance of the place are early twentieth century garden and orchard features which are tangible evidence in the shift in agricultural and animal husbandry practices by the second generation of the Watson family.

Hermes Number 8797

Property Number

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## History

Gisborne Mains Farm was purchased in 1864 by two Scottish born immigrants, Thomas Watson and Agnes Cunningham. They were very hard workers who achieved a level of affluence uncommon to farmers in the Gisborne district at the time. Thomas' skills in breeding draught horses caught the attention of horsemen and breeders across the district whose livelihood depended on expert animal knowledge. He even brought stud stock from as far away as New Zealand to improve the quality of his teams.

Thomas Watson died in 1891. His funeral procession was reported as being one of the largest to pass through Gisborne, with mourners travelling great distances to pay their respects. A newspaper obituary described Thomas Watson as "one of the oldest and most prosperous farmers in the district" and another correspondent wrote that "there were few better farmers or judges of stock (particularly draught horses), being himself at one time a large breeder of this class of stock...".

With the settlement of probate, Agnes assumed control of Gisborne Mains Farm and continued to live on the farm until her death in 1907. Margaret Watson then inherited the estate from her mother and, together with her spinster sisters Christina and Elizabeth, worked the farm as the sole occupants for the duration of their lives using hired help as required. The role of raising stud stock and selling draught horses appears to have declined under their ownership in favour of sheep farming, cattle, and the production of fruits and dairy items. In about 1965, ill health forced the 95 year old Christina Watson to abandon the only home she had known. And unoccupied, the homestead became prey to vandals. Left vacant for many years, the homestead burnt down in the early 1890s. The house and the wash house was razed to the ground and the fire fighters were forced to push over the chimneys for safety reasons.

The construction of the Calder Freeway (Millett Road to Gisborne Section) resulted in the destruction of many elements including the stables, machinery shed, cow shed, shearing shed, stone and timber fences, and bull pen.

*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/>*