MOUNT AITKEN PASTORAL STATION

Location

740-794 MT AITKEN ROAD DIGGERS REST, MELTON CITY

Municipality

MELTON CITY

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7822-2317

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO60

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

The Mount Aitken Site and Ruin is of at least local heritage significance as a major nineteenth century stud property under John Aitken and Henry Beattie; and also for its associations with key events in Australia's history:- the European foundation and 'first settlement' of the Port Phillip / Melbourne district; and 'fi rst contact' period encounters between the Aboriginal and European peoples.

It is important because of the scarcity of other recorded physical evidence of these events in the Port Phillip district. The Mount Aitken Site and Ruin is likely historically significant at a state level. John Aitken was the first European to settle in the Shire of Melton. He was also one of the first pastoralists to land sheep at Port Phillip. Aitken had been planning to cross Bass Strait as early as 1833, and on 20th July 1835, the day before Fawkner's Enterprize departed to lay claim to the foundation of Melbourne, Aitken left Launceston in the Endeavour to prospect the pastures which John Batman had discovered across the Strait.

On 22nd March 1836 Aitken sailed again with 1600 sheep; in May 600 of these arrived at the Mount Aitken run which he had selected on his 1835 exploration. This has been described as Victoria's first inland occupation of

sheep country.

Overall, the Mount Aitken Site and Ruin is of at least local heritage significance.

Interpretation of Site	The site is associated with the earliest phase of pastoral settlement in Victoria an activity which is still undertaken at the site. Mr John Aitken the original owner acquired this land in 1835. **In** 1860 Mount Aitken was leased from Mr Aitken by Messrs Watson and Hewitt, at that time in charge of Cobb and Co's stage coaches, and the estate was used by them to graze the coach horses. The Cobb & Co company introduced Australia to 'a new coaching age' which lasted until the mid 1920s. Its innovatory staging, vehicles, teams, and drivers were the basis of this revolution. For a period, Mount Aitken was an integral part of the winning Cobb & Co. strategy of fresh horses and short stages. When Messrs Watson and Hewitt's lease expired in 1867, Mt Aitken was leased by Mr Henry Beattie who remained in possession for about 40 years, until the time of his death. After being in possession of Mr Aitken for more than 70 years, the property changed ownership for the first time in 1907, the purchaser being Mr Charles Widdis of Gippsland. Mr Widdis retained the property for some three years and then sold it to Messrs 5 and IN Howell. In 1919 the estate again changed hands, and was bought by Mr Le Patourel, who has now sold the homestead and 1,523 acres to Mr F Gervis-James, of Aroka, Malvern. On 14th January 1944 a fire burnt from Woodend to the Gap, destroying 30 houses and devastating the Couangalt area just north of the Shire. The Toolern Brigade, at work on the west side of the front, were unable to prevent 2100 acres of the Mount Aitken estate, now in the ownership of Mr Scott, and its 'historic 14 room stone house', being burnt out The former homestead site with the ruin was purchased by EWS Charlton, who obtained freehold title 21st June 1961. Scott Charlton had occupied the site in 1950, and built his home not far from the original Aitken homestead Prior to the fire in 1944 the Homestead, built of brick and cement, and contained nine spacious rooms, besides bathroom, kitchen, laundry, dairy etc, and was fitted with all modern conveniences, such as hot and cold water service, lighting, sewerage, telephone, etc. The outbuildings comprised a brick cottage of five rooms, with kitchen, and men's dining-room, men's brick cottage of three rooms, stabling for ten horses, chaffhouse, implement sheds, motor garage, wool shed, sheep yards and dip One of the original routes linking Melbourne with the Mount Alexander gold fields was one of the original 'Mount Macedon' tracks, one of which crossed the Mount Aitken home station property. Early plans show the alignment of this track passing through the property in approximately in the location of the bluestone build ing presently remaining on the site, and then north to Gisborne along the station track towards the woolshed.
Archaeological Significance	The site is of high archaeological significance owing to its' size and the presence of multiple footings, a single standing structure and at least one known rubbish dump. Access was provided in August 2012. Information about the site has been supplied by aerial photographs, historical data, earlier photographs and a recent report by Hewitt (2011). Historical maps and other documents indicate some of the type of places that once existed on-site, and for which archaeological evidence might remain. While all but one building has been demolished, evidence of building materials, footings and artefacts remain. These, together with artefacts, possible cellars, or associated water tanks etc, should be subject to archaeological investigation. The site holds archaeological potential under the following broad possibilities: - identity of former early structures, landscape features and subsurface features; - high likelihood of subsurface deposits associated with the site; - analysis of cultural materials allowing for interpretation of occupation phases of the site

| Historical Significance | For two decades Aitken was revered as the colony's leading flockmaster, described as the 'first and most useful of our wool kings'. Historians have also judged his Mount Aitken stud to have been the most significant contributor to the improvement of Victoria 's merino sheep up to the 1860s. In addition to being a famous sheep breeder, Aitken was also a respected and popular citizen of the pioneering European community. He named the Pentland Hills, and Governor Sir Richard Bourke named Mount Aitken after him. He was elected as mediator and representative in relation to social and pastoral issues, and for sporting occasions; citizens donated a portrait of him to the Melbourne City Council.

However his relations with the local native population were tense, and his Mount Aitken station became the scene of an encounter which would appear to have been instigated by Aboriginal peoples' anxiety to reclaim their country. The hill district from Sunbury to Gisborne, and including Mount Aitken, was the meeting place of the two streams of Victoria 's first European settlers (overstraiters and overlanders), and is of key significance in the pastoral development and history of the state. The early painting 'View from Mt Aitken looking towards the Dandenong Ranges' depicting the open woodland and prime grasslands that were the raison d'etre for the European occupation of Victoria, is indicative of this historical significance. The place is also significant for its associations with stud-livestock breeder Henry Beattie, whose Mount Aitken Hereford stud was one of the best and most famous in Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His breeding of Comeback sheep (English Leicester - Merino) made a significant contribution to the development of one of Australia's most useful general-purpose wool and meat sheeps, taken up by mixed farmers in southeast Australia from the early twentieth century. His Shropshire sheep and Clydesdale horse breeding programs were also of note. Beattie served four separate terms as President of the Shire of Melton. Despite disturbance of the property, it is likely that some archaeological evidence of the Aitken era dwellings, outbuildings or other works survives. It is also likely that evidence survives of part of the original track to the station, which formed one of the alternative routes of Victoria 's first inland road, the Mount Macedon Road (and the Mount Alexander Road during the goldrush). Early drystone walls also survive. The original purpose and date of the large ruin, likely to have been built by John Beattie, is not known at this stage. The mature conifer and other shelter plantings on the site are representative of common pastoral and farming practices of a later date, and contribute to the significance of the place. |
|---|---|
| Other Names | "BOOMERA", |
| Hermes Number | 195376 |
| Property Number | |

History

The place is associated with the Mount Aitken pastoral run, established by squatter John Aitken . Aitken was not only the first European settler in this locality, but one of the first pastoralists to land sheep at Port Phillip. Aitken had begun planning to cross Bass Strait as early as 1833. On 20 July 1835, the day before Fawkner's Enterprize departed to lay claim to the foundation of Melbourne, Aitken left Launceston in the Endeavour to prospect the pastures which John Batman had discovered across the Strait. His party returned to Launceston on 29 August 1835. On 22 March 1836 Aitken again set sail for Port Phillip, this time to settle. Some 1600 sheep were loaded aboard the brig Chili. **It** ran aground on a sandbank off Arthur's Seat, where the surviving sheep were landed and driven (with the help of local Aboriginal people) around to the embryonic settlement of Melbourne on the Yarra. On May 6th 1836 Aitken drove the 600 remaining sheep to the uplands between Sunbury and Gisborne where he had previously chosen to settle. He set up a tent, and with the assistance of three men, looked after his sheep and a horse on a ten square mile run. **In** March 1837 John Aitken acted as a guide for Governor Bourke's party

on its climb of Mount Macedon. Bourke was impressed by Aitken, and named the hill at his station Mount Aitken . Both Bourke and Captain Phillip Parker King recorded the fine pasture and water in the area to the east and north of Aitken's station. King's diary records Aitken as 'a shrewd, sensible, and persevering person, who travelled much about the country'. **In** c.1837 the pioneer pastoralists the Learmonth brothers, Henry Anderson, and William Cross Yuille mustered at Aitken's station for an exploratory trip around central and western Victoria. Aitken named the Pentland Hills near Bacchus Marsh after the range of this name near Edinburgh.

John Aitken's settlement at Mount Aitken has been described as Victoria's ' ... first inland occupation of sheep country.' The improvement of Victoria's merino sheep up to the 1860's owed more to Aitken than to any other sheep breeder. 'No pioneering enterprise was more useful to Port Phillip', one historian concluded of the Mount Aitken pastoral run. Fastidious with his stock, Aitken was revered as the colony's leading flockmaster. From c.1840 he crossed Leicesters with Merinos as part of the object of increasing the weight of fleece as well as retaining the fineness and density of the wool; he achieved high sale prices for his lambs and wool, both locally and in London. He won half the prizes at the second Melbourne Show in 1842, and is thought to have stocked many of the local pastoral leases with Merinos. He also raised William Lyall's breed of Hereford cattle. Each year some two hundred buyers attended his annual sale of Saxon sheep, which was preceded by a lavish champagne lunch and followed by an all-night carousal. These sales, begun in 1845, were thought by Batey to have been the first annual ram sales in Port Phillip. By 1847 reports of the event were being circulated around Australia:- "Mr Aitken's annual sale of rams came off yesterday at Mount Aitken, at twelve o'clock - the attendance was most numerous, including, we must justly say, the majority of the wealth and fashion of Melbourne; a most admirably prepared dejeuner a la fourchette was partaken of by the guests, and the happy union of business and pleasure was never more successful than on this occasion. The proceeds of the sales (allowing even, the overestimated sum of £200 for the cost of the lunch) must have realised something very close to £2000." A c.1852 watercolour entitled 'View from Mt Aitken looking towards the Dandenong Ranges' - one of the few illustrations contained in PL Brown's noted record of the early Port Phillip squatters - depicts the open woodland and prime grasslands that illustrate the very reason for the first European settlement of Port Phillip.

Described as a taciturn Scot, Aitken was admired and liked by his squatter colleagues, and played a leading role in the early squatting society of Port Phillip. Before the arrival of Government or law, he was elected one of the arbitrators of a dispute between John Pascoe Fawkner and Henry Batman, and was a steward of Melbourne's first horse race meeting. He was also prominent in public meetings on issues such as Aboriginal access to firearms, and threat of the sheep disease catarrh amongst the squatters flocks. By the time he departed for England in 1857 he was a prominent and respected identity; citizens acquired his portrait and donated it for hanging at the Melbourne Town Hall (it is now held by the State Library of Victoria). In the 1850s he was Justice of the Peace for the Gisborne District. A main street of Gisborne was named after him, as was the gold-rush wayside town of Aitkens Gap. Isaac Batey, as a youth, observed the 'famous sheep breeder' talking to his father at Kirk Bazaar before he left for overseas, noted that he was 'a handsome old gentleman', and that there was a move to present him with a testimonial before he returned to England (in 1857).

Contemporary squatter John Brown described Aitken as 'A handsome, kindly man, returning help when it is needed.' Others described him as a 'kind, hospitable, generous man.' An Argus article of 1945 suggested that this northern part of Melton Shire, with the adjoining areas in the two adjacent municipalities, was of pre-eminent significance in the early pastoral history of Victoria, as the meeting of the two streams of European settlement of Port Phillip. While Aitken, Evans, Jackson and other 'overstraiters' ventured northwards from Williamstown, 'overlander' parties from NSW, such as Howey, Coghill, Riddell and Hamilton (and later George Hyde of Green Hills) penetrated southward; the two streams meeting among the hills between Sunbury and Gisborne. Thus, declared the writer, 'these hills take pride of place in the pastoral and agricultural development of the State ... ' Relations with the Aboriginal People Notwithstanding the help Aboriginal people had given him in landing sheep at Dromana in 1836, relations with the local Aboriginal people on at Mount Aitken do not appear to have been cordial. There are several accounts of his encounters with the local Aboriginal people. The most dramatic account, by a contemporary, has him locked in hand to hand combat with a single native intent on his provisions, from whom he managed to escape by mounting his horse and fleeing. Although in his late fifties during Victoria's squatting phase, Aitken was strong and powerful. In 1838 he narrowly escaped being hacked to death by a native armed with a tomahawk, apparently a deliberate act of resistance by local natives to the occupation of their land - in April 1838.

A party of 40-50 ranged widely around the territory, going first to John Aitken, who managed to dispossess them of two of their three guns. He recorded the incident:- 'I was attacked by about 40 native blacks at my station on the 14th of April last. They came to me armed with spears and three guns. I called my men about me when they came up. They stood still and we brought out what guns we had in the hut, and we called out as if there were

other people about us. The blacks then retreated about a hundred yards and got behind a rock. I rode up and, when within 30 yards, two of them levelled their guns at me over the cover of the rock. I then rode around them, and came in behind them. There were three or four under cover and on my getting behind them they went up to the rest of the tribe. I followed and got the assistance of Mr White and then went up to the black and succeeded in getting two guns from them. They cocked their guns as we went up to them. When I took hold of the gun the black named DeVilliers or Warra Worrock attempted to strike me with a tomahawk. After taking the guns, the blacks went away.'

The next day, with women and children, the party visited George Evans (Emu Bottom) and camped at Jackson's (at Sunbury), threatening a shepherd, spearing sheep and setting their dogs upon the flock, driving up to 50 away. They continued on to other squatting stations towards the Werribee where similar 'depredations' took place. On 19th May the speared and disembowelled body of shepherd Samuel Fallon was found near Mt Macedon. A party of seven natives were captured and taken to Sydney for trial.

Another view of Aitken and the natives during these episodes is recorded by Batey. Original pioneer Kenneth Scobie Clark, pastoral manager for the Great Lake Company, had told him:' Aitken would not permit the aborigines to trespass upon his run, and also that the blacks feared him. One of his [Clark's] items was to the effect that Aitken, grappling with a native, did his best to break the man's neck.' While Batey conceded that Clark was not always the most 'strictly reliable' witness, the Clark account of the blacks' attitude to Aitken was corroborated by another, reliable, witness 'who recounted an old lubra who asked him if "Debbil debbil was dead" meaning of course, John Aitken.' Aitken's own account of the relations with local Aboriginal people was expressed in a letter to Governor La Trobe in 1853. When the 'Mt. Macedon tribe' came to his tent soon after his arrival at Mt. Aitken:- , . I did all in my power to conciliate them, by giving them rations of rice, sugar, flour etc. while they remained about the place'.

The tribe in the Mount Aitken area however was ' ... more savage than the Western Port tribe, a neighbour of mine (Mr Franks) and his servant being murdered by serving out food to them ... I had great reason to be thankful that I succeeded in saving myself and shepherds from sharing a similar fate'. In the 1850s Aitken extended his network of pastoral leases in the area, from Jacksons Creek near Gisborne to Skeleton Creek at Tarneit, perhaps with a view to moving his flocks during droughts. Around 1851 everything changed for Aitken and other local squatters. In the wake of the unparalleled drought of 1850, and then the 'Black Thursday' fires, on 6 February, WJT 'Big' Clarke had grabbed some 183 square miles of their prime land as part of his Sunbury Special Survey. Aitken's homestead allotment had been secured in 1841 by an English land order, and as he held other runs he was not as seriously affected as most local pastoralists. Although not completely absorbed, Aitken still lost the southern portion of his run. He had previously applied for security of tenure, which may have been the reaon that his preemptive right section was 786 acres rather than the usual 640 acres. With further purchases of adjacent crown land that had not been part of the Special Survey he was able to secure a relatively small pastoral estate. In late 1854, shortly after his arrival from Scotland, Henry Beattie obtained employment with Aitken . By 1855-56 Aitken had made him the manager of the property. The regard was obviously mutual, as Beattie named his second son John Aitken Beattie in honour of the pastoralist. Around 1855 Aitken built a 'new stuccoed bluestone homestead'. There is a photograph of this double-fronted single storey Victorian villa, with a return verandah, and large rear portion in the Beattie's family history. In 1857 Aitken left on a trip for England, apparently 'to better the children's experiences of life '. The Argus reported his leaving under the heading:- 'First and Most Useful of our Wool Kings goes to England'. Aitken died in London in October 1858.

In 1860 Mount Aitken was leased by a George Watson and a Mr Hewitt for seven years. Another source informs that that 'Messrs Watson and Hewitt' were 'in charge of Cobb and Co's stage coaches, and that the Mount Aitken estate was used by them to graze coach horses.' Governor Bourke's 1837 estimation that the property afforded 'good pasture for horses, sheep and cattle' had been proven judicious. 'Cobb and Co', Australia's famous coaching company, had been inaugurated in January 1854 on the Mount Alexander Road gold diggings route. By coincidence, one of the original routes linking Melbourne with the Mount Alexander gold fields was one of the original 'Mount Macedon' tracks, one of which crossed the Mount Aitken home station property. Early plans show the alignment of this track passing through the property in approximately in the location of the bluestone building presently remaining on the site, and then north to Gisborne along the station track towards the woolshed. This alignment was competing with others, and by 1851 a road had been surveyed through the Mount Aitken station, but east of the eastern gully (not on the subject site). Evidence of this track is said to be visible now when the grass burns off. This road in turn became less popular when the government chose to invest its roadworks in what became known as Mount Alexander Road (the Calder Highway) a little further east again. This place became a key staging post for teams and travellers to the gold-field established, which in turn grew into a settlement, then a town, known as Aitken's Gap, or The Gap. While the lawless early days of the gold rush had

passed, Aitken's Gap was still a wild place in 1858 when traveller William Kelly arrived by coach:- 'Arrived at the top, it was a scene of extraordinary bustle and uproar, for it was then a special camping place for drivers and carriers, and the scores upon scores of horse drays and bullock-wagons that were preparing for a start, produced an amount of tumult, altercation, blasphemy, and compound abominations which would not find many readers even if I succeeded in reproducing it.'

The development of Aitkens Gap would not have been possible without the springs in the area to water the travellers' horses and bullocks. Again, Governor Bourke's early note of the 'excellent herbage and frequent waterholes' in the district had again proven perceptive. Especially in the early days of the gold-rush, when no roadworks had been undertaken and every track was in the same disrepair, carts and bullock wagons chose which track to take depending on gradient, or seasonal variations of mud and availability of water. (One teamster reported that he and his horses arrived at the Gap 'nearly famished' during the 1850s, and found he had to buy five buckets of water, at two shillings a bucket, at a shanty. It would have been under these circumstances that many travellers would have continued to use the tracks through Aitken's land, following creeks and waterholes. The establishment of stores and hotels, such as the Gap Inn, the Manchester and the Bald **Hill** hotel (owned by the family of Frank Millett, one of the key informants for the 1963 'Mt Aitken' thesis) in 1854 prompted the Government to survey a township that it named 'Aitken's Gap', after the respected pioneer pastoralist. One of the largest gold escort stations, with by far the largest forage requirement in the District of Bourke, was also established there. The Cobb & Co company introduced Australia to 'a new coaching age' which lasted until the mid 1920s. Its innovatory staging, vehicles, teams, and drivers were the basis of this revolution. For a period, Mount Aitken was an integral part of the winning Cobb & Co. strategy of fresh horses and short stages. Its teams of thoroughbreds 'maintained a fast trot or hand-gallop up and down hills over the short stages of 10 miles.' 'They are horses that stand pretty high, with a good action', Freeman Cobb noted proudly.

Local resident Isaac Batey concurred, noting that the best team did the last return leg from Keilor to Melbourne: six horses, 'all of them magnificent greys. a grand show.' The company's short stages meant fresher horses and faster travel, and by the end of 1855 Cobb & Co's two services to Bendigo took just one day, half that of its respected rival, the Royal Mail. Cobb & Co's popular 'Yankee Whips' were much admired for their progressive driving style. Batey observed a 'Cobbs coach' on its run down the long straight grade ofthe Aitken's Gap Hill :- 'The way the driver tooled his team down at a pace a little short of a gallop without question was something grand.'

With competition from the new train line, which opened to Bendigo in 1862, Cobb & Co. ceased its Mount Alexander Road service in that same year. By this time the name 'Cobb & Co' was legendary around the country; it was later immortalised in a Henry Lawson poem. The company's lease of the Mount Aitken estate however didn't conclude until 1867; it is not known how the property was used in the intervening five years. It is faintly possible that there would be fabric remaining on the property from this short, but historic, occupancy of Cobb & Co. Henry Beattie's Era. In 1867 former property overseer Henry Beattie took over the lease of the property. Under his direction, it again became famous, mainly for its Hereford cattle stud. The 1000 per annum 5 year leases issued to Beatty during his term required him to paint the buildings, repair fire-damaged fences, 'keep up the external boundary fences', erect a windmill, keep the property free of thistles and noxious weeks (especially 'Bathurst Burr'), not to cut down trees, and not to crop more than 30 acres of ground (and restore it for pastoral purposes afterwards). Beattie's station records show that in 1868 he was busy repairing and building up the property. He employed pieceworkers to build nearly 700 metres of dry stone walling, and nearly twice that length of post and three-rail fencing. The property had a six stand shearing shed, as there are repeated records of his employing six blade shearers in the season.

In November 1869 he began his Hereford Stud with bulls and cows purchased from Cressy Stud in Tasmania. In August 1874 an advertisement in the Argus announced 'The First Annual Sale of the Mount Aitken Stock, consisting of pure and half bred Hereford Cattle, pure Leicester, South Down and Cotswald sheep, Clydesdale and thoroughbred Horses.'.[58] Beattie had re-instituted the Aitken tradition of annual stock auctions, complete with champagne lunches.

In 1875 Beattie purchased Yallock, a rich cattle-fattening property at Westernport. In 1876 he purchased more stud cattle from William Lyall's famous Harewood stud at Westernport. Henry and his sons were firmly establishing themselves in stud-livestock breeding, and as dealers in fats and store bullocks, fat lambs, sheep and wool production.

In his memoirs Harry H Peck (son of John Murray Peck, one of the founders of Cobb & Co and a good friend of Beattie) recalled that Henry Beattie 'the famous Hereford breeder of Mt Aitken, in the 70s, before the days of

Plumptons, often welcomed a small coterie from Newmarket to private coursing matches on Mt Aitken, with John Murray Peck and Augustus P Rudd as chief organisers.' At the conclusion of the day all would adjourn to the homestead for a friendly glass before starting for home, and on the table were decanters of whisky, gin and brandy. Amusing stories of these days were retold amongst the friends for years. Peck described Beattie as:- 'A dour Scotsman but fond of a joke, with curly hair and a full brown beard, Beattie was plain of dress, but clothed and booted with the best of hard-wearing tweed and leather.'

Henry Beattie travelled to England in 1889 to purchase Hereford bulls and cows. He visited England to make his own selections, which included winners at the English Royal Show. **HH** Peck records that his Hereford herd became famous all over Australia, both in the show ring and as sires and bulls went to all states from Mount Aitken and Gisborne Park. Reports of the purchases, sales and movements of Beattie's Mount Aitken stud stock circulated around the Australian media. In 1870 the Argus noted that he imported the Clydesdale 'Conqueror'. In 1874 the Brisbane Courier noted the price of Hereford bulls 'At the sale of the Mount Aitken stock'. In 1880 the Maitland Mercury noted that at the National Agricultural Society's Show, attended by the Governor Sir William Jervois, Sir Arthur Kennedy and the Duke of Manchester, 'in Herefords, Henry Beattie of Mount Aitken took all of the International gold, silver and two bronze medals.' While in England Beattie had also purchased stud Shropshire sheep and on returning established his Shropshire sheep stud on Mount Aitken. This was the first pedigreed sheep of this breed imported to Australia.[69]ln 1900 Beattie purchased the Gisborne Park property; with Mount Aitken and Yallock, this was run as a single operation: Henry Beattie and Sons.

Beattie was a regular supplier of fat sheep and cattle, and often attended Newmarket, where **HH** Peck got to know him well. Peck described Beattie's contribution to pure stock breeding in very high terms, comparing him to the 'genius' of Robert Clarke (the manager of the Sir WJ Clarke's pastoral empire). Tasmanian breeders early on bought Shropshires from Mount Aitken, and 'Ben Aitken', and 'Pale Aitken' were two sires that later appeared in many pedigrees in that state. 'However', said Peck, it was 'in producing a definite and fixed type of Comeback as early as the 'seventies from crosses of English Leicesters and Merinos, was where Henry Beattie showed his skill and knowledge of sheep-breeding and husbandry. These Mount Aitken fixed comebacks were a beautiful type of general purpose sheep, carrying soft-handling, lustrous wool of great character covering shapely bodies, and were a very payable proposition, but the flock unfortunately was dispersed at the Mount Aitken sale after Mr Beattie's death.' Beattie also bred Clydesdales successfully, and 'altogether his studs, herds and flocks were always outstanding in class and condition.' In 1891-92 Beattie and his family were apparently shocked when the trustees of Aitken's estate sold Mount Aitken over his head to the Widdis family of Gippsland. However the Widdis' allowed Beattie to see out his days there undisturbed for another 15 years. On the 10th August 1906 Henry Beattie died at Mount Aitken. Henry Beattie was a long-serving councillor of the Shire of Melton, and had served four separate terms as President.

The Twentieth Century

Charles Widdis sold the property to to Samuel and James Norman Howell. In 1911 they applied to have a Torrens title issued for the 3,787 acre site. This enabled them, in 1912, to begin subdividing and selling parts of the property in small farms, mostly under 200 acres.' JN Howell's homestead property passed to Mr LePatourel in 1919. In 1923 the Argus carried a series of advertisements and reports regarding the forthcoming sale of the Mount Aitken estate, which had been subdivided by Mr Arthur Le Patourel:- 'The property was for many years the home of the Hereford cattle of the late Mr Beattie. It is particularly good agricultural, grazing and fattening country, and all classes of stock from this property invariably topped the Melbourne markets.' It includes some 'magnificent black volcanic land', the hay from which has 'realised top prices'.

In September a more detailed account provided some insights into the estate as it was then:- 'The Homestead block contains 896 acres, lying between the East and the West Kororoit Creeks, both of which are absolutely permanent. Nearly all of this land is capable of being put under cultivation and could be used for growing any kind of crop, such as hay, barley, mangolds, the latter having grown with great success for feeding stock by the late Mr Henry Beattie during the many years the property was used by him for a stud farm.' The Homestead, which commands a splendid view, is built of brick and cement, and contains nine spacious rooms, besides bathroom, kitchen, laundry, dairy etc, and is fitted with all modern conveniences, such as hot and cold water service, lighting, sewerage, telephone, etc. The outbuildings are practically new and comprise brick cottage of five rooms, with kitchen, and men's dining-room, men's brick cottage of three rooms, stabling for ten horses, chaffhouse, implement sheds, motor garage, wool shed, sheep yards and dip. Mount Aitken has been fattening a bullock to three and a half and four acres, and the fat cattle walk from their paddocks to the Newmarket sale yards in nine hours, making the blocks well worth the attention of anyone requiring depot paddocks.'

In December the Argus advised:- 'Mount Aitken Estate Sold ':- 'Mount Aitken homestead and 1,523 acres of rich grazing and agricultural land, three miles from Sunbury, on the main Melbourne to Bendigo road, together with the homestead of brick and cement, and outbuildings. Mr John Aitken the original owner acquired this land in 1835 [sic]. In 1860 Mount Aitken was leased from Mr Aitken by Messrs Watson and Hewitt, at that time in charge of Cobb and Co's stage coaches, and the estate was used by them to graze the coach horses. When Messrs Watson and Hewitt's lease expired, in 1867, Mt Aitken was leased by Mr Henry Beattie who remained in possession for about 40 years, until the time of his death. After being in possession of Mr Aitken for more than 70 years [sic], the property changed ownership for the first time in 1907, the purchaser being Mr Charles Widdis of Gippsland. Mr Widdis retained the property for some three years and then sold it to Messrs Sand IN Howell. Nearly four years ago the estate again changed hands, and was bought by Mr Le Patourel, who has now sold the homestead and 1,523 acres to Mr F GervisJames, of Aroka, Malvern.'

On 14th January 1944 a fire burnt from Wood end to the Gap, destroying 30 houses and devastating the Couangalt area just north of the Shire. The Toolern Brigade, at work on the west side of the front, were unable to prevent 2100 acres of the Mount Aitken estate, now in the ownership of Mr Scott, and its 'historic 14 room stone house', being burnt out. The part of the former estate north of Aitken's Road was subdivided under the Soldier Settlement Act 1946 into five allotments. Allotment A3, the former homestead site with the ruin, was purchased by EWS Charlton, who obtained freehold title 21st June 1961. Scott Charlton had occupied the site in 1950, and built his home not far from the original Aitken homestead.

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/