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# Sunbury Rings Cultural Landscape

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## Location

SUNBURY, HUME CITY

## Municipality

HUME CITY

## Level of significance

State

## Heritage Listing

National Trust

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is significant?

The *Sunbury Rings Cultural Landscape* (SRCL) is a shared cultural landscape associated with, and providing strong evidence of, Aboriginal settlement and land use, and the first settlement of Port Phillip by Europeans in the 1830s. It is a place of living cultural heritage and ongoing significance for the Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council.

The SRCL is a valley formed by Jacksons Creek with a steep eastern escarpment and gentler western escarpment. The range of volcanic hills and sedimentary slopes that run north-south to the west of the SRCL helped develop the large alluvial plains on the west bank of Jacksons Creek.[1] These rich alluvial flats contributed to making Jacksons Creek an important source of food for both Aboriginal people and European settlers. The eastern bank connects to large basalt plains that run to Emu Creek. The steep embankment has been formed by Jacksons Creek cutting deeply into the basalt and is the dominating topographical feature of the area.

The landscape contains three Aboriginal earthen rings on the western slopes. It is likely that the SRCL was used as an Aboriginal gathering place and these three extremely rare earth rings (*Sunbury Rings*) are evidence of Aboriginal land use. The rings are owned and managed by the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council.

The northern boundary of the landscape is bounded by Emu Bottom Homestead, settled by Europeans in the 1830s. The Emu Bottom Wetlands on the valley floor south of Emu Bottom connects to agricultural land owned and managed by the Silesian Order, who own Rupertswood Mansion at the southern end of the landscape.

The natural landscape features provided appeal as a place of recreation and beauty for Melbournians in the nineteenth century. The *Jacksons Creek Railway Bridge*, built during the construction of the railway is a major landscape feature. Jackson's Creek has been used by Europeans since settlement as a place of gathering including large volunteer militia encampments in the 1860s and the Eucharistic Festivals 1930-1980 at *Rupertswood*, all taking place along Jacksons Creek.

How is it significant?

This landscape is of Aboriginal heritage significance, historical, aesthetic, archaeological and scientific (environmental) importance to Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Sunbury Rings Cultural Landscape is historically significant because of its role a key place of interaction between people and the land over thousands of years. Indigenous land use is preserved in the landscape as is some of the oldest pastoral use of the land by settlers at *Emu Bottom*. The landscape testifies to the changes that have taken place in Victoria since settlement. Read as a whole the landscape presents a clear historical narrative of the history of Aboriginal land use and European settlement of the greater Melbourne region.

The *Sunbury Rings* are three of eight such rings in Victoria (two others are also located in the Sunbury area and other examples are less intact) making them extremely rare. The landscape of Jacksons Creek contributed to the use of the land by Aboriginal people. The alluvial flats and basalt plains made it an important source of food as well as providing water. The Rings are best understood as being part of the broader landscape rather than individual or isolated elements. The view lines and space around them play a part in understanding their context and use.

The assets that made Jacksons Creek so valuable to the Traditional Owners of the area also made it valuable to the European settlers who arrived on the *Enterprise* in 1835. George Evans and William Jackson were the first settlers to find the Sunbury area and Jacksons Creek particularly appealing. Evans' homestead, *Emu Bottom*, built in 1836 is considered to be one of the oldest homestead in Victoria and Jackson's squat later became the site of *Rupertswood*. The movement of the Clarke family into Sunbury in 1850 had a major impact on the landscape and the growth of the region. Clarke's huge pastoral holdings included Jacksons Creek to the north of Sunbury and the Clarke family had significant impact on the use of the valley.

The landscape is aesthetically significant for its landscape character and general preservation from the encroachment of development. The landscape has long been recognised as an exceptional aesthetic setting that drew people from Melbourne and the coast into inland Victoria. The ridge lines and views of the valley are particularly important in maintaining this level of aesthetics.

The landscape is of archaeological significance because of the presence of early settlement sites and established archaeological deposits. *Canon Gully* is registered in the Heritage Inventory for its established archaeological value and evidence of the volunteer militia camps of the 1860s but there are also other sites in the landscape that have potential to be archeologically significant to both Aboriginal cultural history and post-contact history.

The landscape is of scientific and environmental significance because of the remnant vegetation that exists in the area. The area contains important native vegetation that is increasingly lost in other areas in and around Sunbury due to development and growth in the region. The landscape is one of the last intact examples of the vast grasslands that once dominated the west of Melbourne and made the area highly sought after as pastoral land by settlers.

[1] David Moloney and Vicki Johnson, *Hume: Hume Heritage Study of the Former Shire of Bulla District*, 1998, CL1-2.

This classification only relates to the northern part of this landscape from 'Rupertswood' in the south to 'Emu Bottom' in the north. The landscape is bounded by Racecourse Road to the west and Jacksons Creek escarpment to the east.

Hermes Number 200034

Property Number

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## **Extent of Registration**

This classification only relates to the northern part of this landscape from 'Rupertswood' in the south to 'Emu Bottom' in the north. The landscape is bounded by Racecourse Road to the west and Jacksons Creek escarpment to the east.

*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/>*