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# THOMAS AGAR'S IRRIGATION PUMP HOUSE

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## Location

RIVERBEND PARK, 165 RIVERSDALE DRIVE, WERRIBEE.

## Municipality

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7822-2433

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - December 5, 2023

### What is significant?

The visible remains of a concrete and iron-alloy structure (concrete piers/foundations and iron-alloy brackets) and associated evident landscape modifications; and any additional archaeological features, deposits and historic modifications to the landscape that relate to the occupation/function of the site as a pump house during the period c. 1893 to c.1940.

### How is it significant?

The site is of historical and archaeological significance at a local level.

### Why is it significant?

The site is historically significant as it:

- Is associated with the historically significant period of occupation of the 'Quantin Binnah' farming property during Thomas Agar's occupation/ownership period (1893 to 1902), and the subsequent early twentieth-century occupation and irrigation of land encompassing the site for farming purposes during the early-twentieth century; and
- Is associated with nineteenth-century irrigation schemes and the development of agriculture in the Werribee region. In particular, due to its association with George Chaffey's failed Werribee Irrigation Trust (WIT) and the relocation/repurposing of irrigation equipment originally forming part of the WIT's irrigation infrastructure.

The site has archaeological significance for:

- Its potential to contain historical archaeological features, deposits and artefacts associated with the construction and period of use of the site's currently identified primary feature – a concrete structure (pump house) dating from c.1893 to c.1940.

A summary of this analysis is provided below, for additional information please see supporting document submitted with this site card. The archaeological significance of the nominated site (Thomas Agar's Pump Irrigation Pump House) presented below has been assessed against Heritage Victoria's significance thresholds 'Policy for Determining Low Archaeological Value' (Heritage Victoria, 2018). As a result, the site has been assessed as: having 'low to moderate' archaeological value; and as meeting the threshold for listing on the VHI (under the Heritage Act 2017) as an archaeological site of local significance. Significance Threshold A (archaeology) Background research and the field survey indicate that: • The site meets the definition of an archaeological site under the Heritage Act 2017 • There is variable – 'low to high potential' – for archaeological features and deposits to be preserved within and in the immediate vicinity of the current visible structural elements of what has been identified as a former irrigation pumphouse; in summary: – There is high potential for additional structural features dating to c.1893 pump house (not currently evident at surface level) to be preserved at the site; – There is moderate potential for landform modification such as channelling or pump/pipe emplacement locations to be preserved as archaeological features at sub-surface level to the north of currently visible elements of HF2, potentially extending to the edge of the Werribee River; and – There is low to moderate potential for significant archaeological deposits associated with the c.1893 to 1940s functional use of the pump house, and associated occupation of the study area as a farming property, to be preserved in the immediate vicinity of currently visible elements of HF2. • Any preserved archaeological features and/or deposits will potentially be associated with the c.1893 to the 1940s occupation of the site as a farming property and the operation of the pump house, and are likely to be in a condition that could contribute to an understanding of the site's historic occupation and the nature of the pump house as an architectural feature. The proposed site extent (see Map 5 and Map 6 supporting document) includes: • The visible footprint of a concrete structure (HF2); and • A curtilage of land (AS1) surrounding the above structure that potentially includes additional features and/or deposits associated with the nineteenth to early-twentieth century occupation of the site and functional use of the former pumping station. • The construction of the Werribee River Walking track, located to the south of the concrete piers, is likely to have disturbed/destroyed any historically significant occupation deposits associated with the pump house that may have originally been located here. As a result, the footprint of the trail has been excluded from the nominated site extent. Significance Threshold B (place history) The site has been assessed as having 'moderate to high' historic heritage significance at a local level. Background research indicates that: • The c.1893 construction and subsequent operation of a pump house to access water from the Werribee River as an irrigation and domestic water supply, is associated with the late-nineteenth to early twentieth century (c.1893-1925) occupation of Quantin Binnah homestead and farming estate; and that • The historic farming property encompassing/associated with the site (Quantin Binnah) is of local heritage significance due to its association with George Chaffey and Thomas Agar. The site has strong historic associations with: the 'Werribee Irrigation Scheme', established by George Chaffey in the 1880s; the scheme's failure in the early 1890s; and the subsequent acquisition of the scheme's assets by Thomas Agar – including irrigation pumping equipment. Historic research suggests that Agar relocated the main pumping equipment – formerly owned by George Chaffey's Werribee Irrigation Scheme Trust – to the study area in c.1893, establishing it in a pump house on the Werribee River. The remains of this pump house are presumed to be evidenced as the identified concrete feature (HF2).

Hermes  
Number 210632

Property  
Number

## History

A summary of this analysis is provided below, for additional details including a series of maps and images please see supporting document submitted with this site card. Historic research conducted as part of this assessment included a review of primary and secondary sources, including historic maps, land titles and newspaper articles. A chronological overview of ownership, land use, landform modifications, and structures evidenced within the study area from 1851 to the present day is provided below. Additional details, including a series of historic maps and aerial images, illustrating the historic occupation of land encompassing the nominated site are provided in the HHA (Dolling & Tranter-Edwards, 2023), submitted as additional supporting documentation. In summary, the available information indicates that the nominated site:

- Is likely the remains of a structure (pump/engine house) built by Thomas Agar in c.1893 to house irrigation pumping equipment acquired from George Chaffey's Werribee Irrigation Scheme, following the scheme's failure in 1893.
- The pumping equipment that is presumed to have been housed at the site, was likely the main pumping equipment (potentially including Tangye engine, boilers, and centrifugal pumps) originally established by George Chaffey ~4km north-west of the nominated site [Note: the original pump location is listed on the VHI as H7822-2395 - Chaffey Channel (part) and Pumping Station].

Primary source material indicates that the pumping equipment was relocated to Thomas Agar's property (Quantin Binnah) on the Werribee River (i.e., the HHA study area) in c.1893, to be used for irrigation purposes and for sourcing domestic water supply for the farm's residence. A summary of the chronological occupation of land encompassing the nominated site is provided below:

- The nominated site is located within the boundaries of the River Ex pastoral run established in 1840 and occupied until the early 1851. Nineteenth-century maps depict a number of structures within the boundaries of the River Ex run none of which are located within the study area/nominated site, and as such it is reasonable to assume that no structures were built within the study area during the pastoral run occupation period (e.g., SGD, 1849).
- Land encompassing the nominated site was first purchased from the Crown in 1851, and between 1851 and 1878 this land formed part of a large pastoral estate owned by number of individuals that became known as the 'Werribee Estate' (The Melbourne Daily News, 09 May. 1851, p. 2; Wagga Wagga Express, 25 Aug. 1875, p.2; SOV, 1878a & SOV 1878b). Maps dating from 1850-1873 mark the house/homestead of the 'Werribee Estate' approximately 1km north of the study area (e.g., PLO, 1857), and as such it can be presumed that the study area remained vacant farmland during this time period.
- In 1878, Thomas Agar purchased the 'Werribee Estate', retaining ownership of the property (encompassing the nominated site) until his death in 1902 (SOV, 1878a & 1878b).
- The 'Werribee Estate' was sold to George Chaffey's 'Werribee Irrigation Trust' in 1888 (Figure 11; Williamstown Chronicle, 10 Nov. 1888, p. 2). However, in 1893, when the trust became insolvent ownership of the land reverted to Thomas Agar. When questioned by the Royal Commission on Water Supply in 1896 about his association with the Chaffey brothers and the trust, Agar outlined that the Chaffey's had paid him a deposit for the land used in the irrigation scheme, but were unable to complete the purchase (Argus, 10 Sept. 1896, p. 5).
- Although Chaffey's 'ownership' period was limited to 5 years (1888 to 1893) it was during this time that he commissioned the construction of a dwelling (later known as 'Quantin Binnah') on land in the vicinity of the nominated site (The Age, 05 Dec. 1889, p.10) [Note: The presumed location of this historic dwelling is detailed in the provided HHA (Dolling & Tranter-Edwards, 2023)].
- In 1893, when ownership of the property reverted to Thomas Agar, Agar is reported to have moved water pumping equipment belonging to the insolvent trust, from its original location (i.e., the original pumping station, ~4km north-west of the study area), re-establishing it on his land holdings at Werribee, encompassing the listed site (The Age, 05 Oct. 1893, p.1; Bendigo Advertiser, 14 Mar. 1895, p.2).
- A newspaper article from 1899 describes a residential dwelling located within/in the vicinity of the HHA study area and includes a reference to a large engine house, presumably located near the residence (Bacchus Marsh Express, 22 Apr. 1899, p.1.).
- The concrete feature identified during the field survey, and subject to this site nomination, is likely the remnant structural components of the 'engine house' [pump house] described above and built by Thomas Agar between in c.1893.
- Ownership of the property encompassing the nominated site changed hands a number of times during the early twentieth-century (SOV, 1902, 1915 & 1925), and in 1925, brothers John and Dudley Smith purchased the property (Weekly Times, 31 Jan. 1925, p. 36). In the first year of their ownership, the Smith brothers constructed a new residence on the property – reportedly located alongside the original 1889 house built by Chaffey (Geelong Advertiser, 27 Oct. 1925, p. 5). Following the construction of this new residence, the Smith Brothers advertised Chaffey's original residence for 'sale and removal' – described at that time as a ten room house built of Oregon wood, lined with red pine, and with a slate roof (Werribee Shire Banner, 12 Mar. 1925, p. 2). The building was reportedly sold for removal to a Stephen Tinkler in October 1925, but was 'destroyed by fire' prior to its removal in the same year. (Geelong Advertiser, 27 Oct. 1925, p. 5; Werribee Shire Banner, 29 Oct. 1925, p. 5).
- Although no mention of the 'engine house/pump house' has been identified in early-twentieth century descriptions of the property, an aerial photograph dating to 1946 shows a small rectangular building on the upper bank of the Werribee River. Given the location of this building on the upper slope of the river, it is

considered likely that this structure is the pump house that was constructed by Thomas Agar in c.1893 (see Map 4). The location of this presumed pump house correlates to that of the extant concrete feature identified during the field survey, which has been nominated for inclusion in the VHI. • Aerial photographs subsequent to 1949 show that: the super-structure of the pumping house had been removed by 1975; and that no significant ground disturbing works appear to have been undertaken within the boundaries of the nominated VHI site post 1975 (Map 5). • The property encompassing the study area was acquired for Municipal Purposes in 1981 and is presently a public park known as Riverbend Park.

*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/>*