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## HO63 - Plumpton Dam



The Plumpton Dam



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### Location

412-518 Plumpton Road DIGGERS REST, MELTON SHIRE

### Municipality

MELTON CITY

### Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

### Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO63

### Heritage Listing

Melton City

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### Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

The Plumpton Dam at 412-518 Plumpton Road Diggers Rest is significant as a rare, and the second largest known, drystone wall private pastoral dam in Victoria. It is also the second largest of a series of at least four large and medium sized drystone dams built on the former WJT Clarke Rockbank station in the Shire of Melton. The Plumpton Dam on Plumpton Road Diggers Rest is almost completely intact.

The Plumpton Dam at 412-518 Plumpton Road Diggers Rest is structurally and aesthetically significant at the STATE level. (AHC D2, E1, F1) It is a very substantial and impressive structure, approximately 140 metres long,

which continues to operate as a dam. It is a finely constructed bluestone structure, employing an unusual construction technique of 'dry' construction, without mortar. Unlike the similar Rockbank Headstation Dam, all of its stones are roughly worked or squared. Its wall is roughly coursed, each course using similar sized stones. The massive coping stones, of uniform size and well laid, make a significant contribution to the unique aesthetic value of the place. The dam wall contains an angle towards its centre. The earth embankment behind the wall appears to have retained its shape and original form to a unique degree. The excellent integrity and condition of the drystone wall face contribute to the dam's very high aesthetic value, as does its intact rural context. The dam also retains intact return abutment walls at both ends. Together with other similar dams built on the Clarke Rockbank estate, it represents an innovative design solution to local climatic and geographical challenges.

The former Plumpton Dam at 412-518 Plumpton Road Diggers Rest is historically significant at the STATE level. (AHC B2, H1) It is the second-largest of a series of at least four large and medium sized drystone dams to have been built on the Clarkes' Rockbank station in the Shire of Melton. No comparable structure or group of structures, comprising long stone dam walls over wide shallow gullies, is known elsewhere in Victoria. This grand scheme was a local response to the particularly low rainfall of the plains area, the difficulty of sinking 'tank' dams in the shallow bedrock of the area, and the local availability of bluestone. Smaller Melton pastoralists and farmers constructed much smaller and more makeshift dams which were also variations on the same principle.

The dam is also significant for its association with Australia's mid nineteenth century pastoral giant WJT Clarke, and his son Sir WJT Clarke, Victoria's leading citizen in the late nineteenth century, and Australia's first baronet. The dam is expressive of the strategic and inherent importance of the 40,000 acre Rockbank property to the Clarke pastoral empire, especially in relation to the fattening and delivery of sheep for the Newmarket meat trade. The massive structure also conveys a sense of the scale of the Rockbank station, whose domination of the Melton Shire was an increasingly acute grievance to local farmers, culminating in the break-up of the estate in the early twentieth century. It is a major relic of the era of large pastoral estates close to Melbourne.

The dam is also significant for its associations with Australia's first 'Plumpton' greyhound coursing enclosure, built by Sir WJ Clarke immediately adjacent to the dam in 1882-83, from which its name derives; and with Harry Houdini's 1910 flight, one of the claimants to the first powered flights in Australia, which occurred on the same paddock.

Overall, the Plumpton Dam at 412-518 Plumpton Road Diggers Rest is of STATE significance.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Melton - Shire of Melton Heritage Study phase 2, David Maloney, David Rowe, Pamela Jellie, Sera Jane Peters, 2007;
Other Names	412 Plumpton Road, Diggers Rest, Plumpton Park,
Hermes Number	30067
Property Number	

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## Physical Description 1

Physical Description -

The Plumpton Dam is a very substantial and impressive structure, approximately 140 metres long, which continues to hold water and be used as a dam. It is a very finely built dry-stone structure, using a range of different sized rocks. Unlike the similar Rockbank Headstation Dam, which utilises a more random rubble construction, the Plumpton Dam is roughly coursed, using different sized stone in each course. Unlike the Rockbank Homestation Dam, all of its stones are roughly worked or squared. The massive coping stones, of uniform size and well laid, make a significant contribution to the unique aesthetic value of the place. Like the Rockbank Homestation Dam the dam wall has an angle towards its centre.

The wall face has a very high level of integrity, and this and its excellent condition contribute to the wall's very high aesthetic value. The intact rural context of the site also contributes to its aesthetic, and to some extent to its historic, values. The fact that it is still used as a dam contributes to its integrity and appearance.

The earth embankment behind the wall appears to have retained its shape and original form to a very high degree. However the embankment behind the wall is riddled with rabbit burrows, which would appear to present a long-term threat to the stability of the whole structure.

Unlike the other Clarke dams it has 10-15 metre returns, or abutment walls at each end which are probably to control overflow outlets, as well as contain the earth embankment behind and provide an attractive finish to the structure.

The Rural Heritage Study assessed this site to be of 'at least regional significance as a fine structure demonstrating a substantial pastoral enterprise, and interestingly, one of two equal examples in the region, both associated with WJT Clarke properties (although it cannot be confirmed that they date from his ownership)'.<sup>[1]</sup> The other structure referred to is the Rockbank Headstation Dam. (Site No.443)

[1] *ibid*

## **Integrity**

Integrity - Substantially Intact

## **Physical Conditions**

Physical Condition - Good

## **Historical Australian Themes**

*Melton Historical Themes: 'Water': 'Pastoralism'; 'Horses, Hounds and Hares'; 'Farming'.*

*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/>*