

Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated 05/04/20



HO118 - Rockbank Headstation Dam



Rockbank Headstation Dam Wall



Rockbank Headstation Dam Wall



Rockbank Headstation Dam Wall - detail



Dry Stone Wall N238 - Rockbank Headstation Dam Wall



Dry Stone Wall N238 - Rockbank Headstation Dam Wall

Location

1233 - 1287 Taylors Rd DEANSIDE, MELTON CITY

Municipality

MELTON CITY

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO118

Heritage Listing

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

The former Rockbank headstation dam at Taylors Road Rockbank is significant as a rare and the largest known drystone wall private pastoral dam in Victoria. It is also the 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. It is now in different ownership from the nearby Rockbank headstation complex (including the bluestone 1864/1884 woolshed and 1870s cottages), which is included in the Victorian Heritage Register. Although now breached in the centre and not holding water, the Rockbank Dam is substantially intact.

The former Rockbank headstation dam at Taylors Road Rockbank is structurally and aesthetically significant at the STATE level (AHC D2, E1, F1) as a finely constructed and visually imposing bluestone structure, employing an unusual construction technique. Its random rubble form uses roughly worked and unworked bluestone, without mortar, in a style that appears to be essentially based on drystone wall construction techniques, but using much larger stones, and crushed bluestone 'metal' packing. It is capped with a course of larger and more regular coping stones. 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 Rockbank headstation dam at Taylors Road Rockbank is historically significant at the STATE level. (AHC B2, H1) Situated at the headstation, it is the 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 (16,000 hectare) Rockbank property to the Clarke pastoral empire, especially in relation to the fattening and delivery of sheep for the Newmarket meat trade. It 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.

Overall, the Rockbank headstation dam 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	1205 - 1231 & 1233 - 1287 Taylors Rd, Plumpton, Deanside' Dam,
Hermes Number	30271
Property Number	

Historical Australian Themes

Integrity

Integrity - Substantially Intact, but partly Damaged/Disturbed

Physical Description 1

Physical Description -

The *Rockbank* headstation drystone wall dam is a very substantial and impressive structure, approximately 200 metres long, and approximately 2.5 to 3 metres high at its centre. It is a very finely built dry-stone structure, using unusually large rocks, of both roughly squared bluestone and unworked fieldstone. The dam wall has a bend, or an angle, towards its centre.

It has a c.10 metre breach in its centre, which means that the dam no longer holds water. On the other hand this reveals more information about the construction of the wall, in particular the use of the bluestone 'metal' filling or packing behind the drystone work. It also allows the full height of the wall to be appreciated. While it diminishes the condition of the structure and its significance, in the context of the size and visual interest of the wall, its overall impact on the significance of the structure is relatively minor. It is likely to be repairable.

In some portions a row of stones appears to have been added to its top course at a later stage. These stones are loosely arranged and seated. If more detailed investigation confirms, as seems apparent, that they are additions, they could be easily removed.

Its context is relatively recent rural residential subdivision. A stand of trees has interrupted its visual relationship to the shearing shed and other buildings on the *Rockbank* headstation

Physical Conditions

Fair, apart from the breach of c. 10 metres in the centre.

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 data owner.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>