

---

# THE HERMITAGE



1 the hermitage maroondah hwy  
narbethong front view restored building

---

## Location

161 MAROONDAH HIGHWAY NARBETHONG, Murrindindi Shire

## Municipality

MURRINDINDI SHIRE

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0303

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO13

## VHR Registration

October 9, 1974

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

---

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 4, 1999

### What is significant?

The Hermitage, Narbethong, is a complex of buildings which was erected in 1894 as a residence, studio and guest house on a thirty-two hectare site on the summit of Black Spur, for internationally renowned anthropological and social photographer, John William Lindt. Born in Germany, Lindt ran away to sea and arrived in Melbourne in 1862. From here he travelled and settled in Grafton, where he remained until 1876, first working for a photographer, before taking over this business, and then opening his own photographic studio.

Lindt subsequently moved to Melbourne, which was a rich and rapidly developing city on his arrival in 1876, and opened a photographic studio in Collins Street, Melbourne. He immediately gained recognition amongst the prosperous members of society and gained a reputation for society, landscape and cityscape photography. He was an official photographer for an expedition of Sir Peter Scratchley to New Guinea in 1885 and for the Melbourne International Exhibition in 1888, and won medals internationally for his work. Lindt travelled extensively abroad and locally, and familiarised himself intimately with such picturesque areas of Victoria as the mountainous forests between Healesville and Marysville. Closing his studio in 1894 after losing his clientele in the financial crisis, it was to this area that Lindt moved and developed his estate, the Hermitage, where he remained until his death in 1926 at the age of 81 years.

Narbethong, situated between Healesville and Marysville, on the route from Melbourne to the Gippsland goldfields, was laid out in 1865 and became a changing point for coaches to the goldfields. In the 1880s timber harvesting began in the area and tourism became popular, with such towns as Healesville and Marysville attracting visitors, particularly after the railway had been constructed to Lilydale in 1881. By the early twentieth century, the trip along the Black Spur was popular, and often included visits to the Hermitage property.

The Hermitage began as a picturesque complex of six separate timber buildings, set in landscaped gardens on a steeply sloping site of Mountain Ash forest. For about fifteen years, from 1894, Lindt improved the property and the establishment grew to accommodate about thirty guests. The buildings included the main house, studio, smokers' cottage and guest house. The studio contained an entire glazed side and a stage at one end, from where Lindt showed lantern slides and lectured to his guests. The garden included three tree houses with ladder access, a raised board walk, entry lych gate, rotunda, fountain, large lake fringed with tree ferns, and tracks were constructed leading to glades and waterfalls in the surrounding forest. Many photographs of the property were taken over Lindt's period of occupancy, and these form an excellent record of the buildings and garden, particularly in the early twentieth century. A number of these were taken from the tree houses on the property.

The garden has been accredited to Ferdinand von Mueller, a friend of Lindt's and a visitor to the Hermitage. It incorporates an avenue of silver birches, and fine tree species, such as Coast Redwood, Sierra Redwood, Himalayan Cedar, Japanese Cedar, Linden, Chestnut, Italian Cypress, Lawson's Cypress and many Rhododendrons and cool climate shrubs.

In the early 1930s, Joan Anderson purchased The Hermitage from Lindt's widow, Catherine, and it continued as a guest house until the 1950s when a change of ownership saw its use alter for the first time, to a weekend holiday house. During this period the condition of the property deteriorated significantly. In 1979 it was sold and progressive restoration of the property was undertaken. It was reopened as a guest house in 1988. The lych gate underwent extensive, and careful, restoration in 1995, with the use of photographs to establish details of the bush timber post structure, the iron covered shingle roof, paling dado, seat, picket gates and decorative lattice work. Since the establishment of The Hermitage, this lych gate was the public focus of the property, and provided many tourists with the only glimpse of this well known retreat. Other buildings have also undergone restoration.

### How is it significant?

The Hermitage, Narbethong is of historical, architectural, aesthetic and scientific (horticultural) significance to the State of Victoria.

### Why is it significant?

The Hermitage, Narbethong is of historical significance due to its association with the renowned photographer, J. W. Lindt and as a highly unusual example of a private mountain retreat. Lindt took numerous photographs of the area and encouraged local tourism to his own property and to the surrounding region. Together with Nicholas Caire, he produced a *Companion Guide to Healesville* in 1904. The Hermitage was a landmark, particularly in

the early twentieth century, and was visited by a number of well known people, such as Dame Nellie Melba and Ferdinand von Mueller.

The Hermitage, Narbethong is of architectural significance as a romantic assemblage of highly distinctive and unusual timber buildings. The influence of Lindt's photographic expeditions to Oceania and New Guinea was reflected in the tree houses (since demolished) and some of the surviving building fabric. It is of significance for its extensive use of local timbers, one of the important industries in the vicinity.

The Hermitage, Narbethong is of aesthetic significance as a picturesque complex set within the remains of a late nineteenth century landscaped garden, possibly designed by Ferdinand von Mueller. It has a number of exotic species that have been retained.

The Hermitage, Narbethong is of scientific (horticultural) significance for its impressive collection of a range of well developed species. The State's largest *Cryptomeria japonica* Eleagans grew until c.1996 outside the entrance to the studio, but it was removed for safety reasons. The garden has two outstanding *Tilia x europaea* (Linden), an impressive row of *Sequoiadendron giganteum* (Sierra Redwood), *Sequoia sempervirens* (Coast Redwood) and *Cryptomeria japonica* (Japanese Cedar), and a *Castanea sativa* (Chesnut), *Abies nordmanniana* (Caucasian Fir), *Cupressus sempervirens* Stricta (Pencil Cypress), and *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* (Lawson's Cypress).

[Online Data Upgrade Project 2004]

## Permit Exemptions

General Conditions: 1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.

General Conditions: 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible. Note: All archaeological places have the potential to contain significant sub-surface artefacts and other remains. In most cases it will be necessary to obtain approval from the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria before the undertaking any works that have a significant sub-surface component.

General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: A Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan.

General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.

General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable.

Minor Works : Note: Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works must submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted.

Construction dates 1894,

Heritage Act Categories Registered place,

Hermes Number 870

Property Number

---

## History

The Hermitage, Narbethong, is a complex of buildings which was erected in 1894 as a residence, studio and guest house on a thirty-two hectare site on the summit of Black Spur, for internationally renowned anthropological and social photographer, John William Lindt. Born in Germany, Lindt ran away to sea and arrived in Melbourne in 1862. From here he travelled and settled in Grafton, where he remained until 1876, first working for a photographer, before taking over this business, and then opening his own photographic studio. Lindt subsequently moved to Melbourne, which was a rich and rapidly developing city on his arrival in 1876, and opened a photographic studio in Collins Street, Melbourne. He immediately gained recognition amongst the prosperous members of society and gained a reputation for society, landscape and cityscape photography. He was an official photographer for an expedition of Sir Peter Scratchley to New Guinea in 1885 and for the Melbourne International Exhibition in 1888, and won medals internationally for his work. Lindt travelled extensively abroad and locally, and familiarised himself intimately with such picturesque areas of Victoria as the mountainous forests between Healesville and Marysville. Closing his studio in 1894 after losing his clientele in the financial crisis, it was to this area that Lindt moved and developed his estate, the Hermitage, where he remained until his death in 1926 at the age of 81 years. Narbethong, situated between Healesville and Marysville, on the route from Melbourne to the Gippsland goldfields, was laid out in 1865 and became a changing point for coaches to the goldfields. In the 1880s timber harvesting began in the area and tourism became popular, with such towns as Healesville and Marysville attracting visitors, particularly after the railway had been constructed to Lilydale in 1881. By the early twentieth century, the trip along the Black Spur was popular, and often included visits to the Hermitage property. The draft statement of significance and the above history were produced as part of an Online Data Upgrade Project 2004. Sources were as follows:  
S. Jones. J. W. Lindt, Master Photographer. Melbourne 1985  
W. Snoek. Lych Gate, The Hermitage, Narbethong Conservation Report. 1995  
M. Tansley. Sites, Structures and Areas of Historical and Archaeological Significance. for Upper Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges Authority. 1978  
S. Symonds. Healesville. History in the Hills. 1982  
Heritage Victoria file no.602588 and HER/2001/000041

## Extent of Registration

*Shire of Healesville*. No.303. The Hermitage, Maroondah Highway, Narbethong.  
[*Victoria Government Gazette* No 100 Wednesday, October 9 1974 p.3649]

*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/>*