

Shire of Melton – A Stone Upon A Stone



"This photograph taken around 1925 shows that even before the 1930s Depression dry stone walls in the area were in a state of disrepair. The photo taken on the Keilor Melton Road shows Jack Tolhurst on the cow with Harold Tolhurst and Mark Cleary." Mary Tolhurst Feb. 2002. Photograph – Courtesy Mary Tolhurst

Melton Shire is a municipality of 527 square kilometres, located on the western fringe of Melbourne, with a population of 45,000. The area is characterised by its flat basalt grassy plains and volcanic cones to the south, and rolling, forest covered hills to the north. Melton Shire consists of two main residential areas, Melton, being the main township, and the Melton-East Growth Corridor, forming the western edge of metropolitan Melbourne. The Shire also features the three small villages of Rockbank, Diggers Rest and Toolern Vale.

Melton Shire's rural areas were mostly settled in the mid 1800s for grazing and limited cropping. The grassy plains provided excellent grazing country for sheep, used in wool production, and cattle before their final muster for sale at the Newmarket Saleyards in Melbourne.

Dry stone walls were the predominant form of fencing in the area as there was an ample supply of stone on the grassy plains. The graziers and farmers cleared the vast amounts of rocks that were exposed at the surface, hence, the name Rockbank. Workers were employed from Melbourne in numerous instances to construct the dry stone walls throughout the paddocks.

Many fences also used a combination of stone at the bottom, and post and wire at the top to define boundaries and confine flocks and herds. Posts were lumbered from the scattered woodlands that existed on the plains of the Rockbank, Toolern Vale and Exford areas of the Shire.

Today, many fine examples of dry stone walls exist throughout the Shire and are visible on main roads such as the Western Highway and dotted throughout the paddocks of the rural pastures.

Selectors and dry stone walls

*The Moylans, early selectors in the district, were recorded in 1870-1871 as owners of several chains of stone wall fencing on their properties. In late 1870 their daughter Margaret Moylan was listed as the lessee. Twenty-seven chains of stone wall and 38 chains of post and rail fences, valued at over £97, had been constructed on her land. In July of the following year her brother, Michael reported that Margaret had 'got me to see how many acres ploughed on her selection ... and to let you know (that is, the Lands Department Bailiff) know. There is about 3_ acres ploughed, two of which are under cultivation.'*¹



This boundary wall of a private property on the Keilor Melton Road typifies the walling style in significant parts of the shire. "In most cases the people who purchased the land would have done quite a lot of the walls. Two wallers Steve Callaghan and Mr. Tugby are buried on the original Moylan property subsequently purchased by my father." Charlie Finch Melton March 2001. Photography – Raelene Marshall



Combination dry stone and post and wire fences are also an important part of the cultural landscape of the area. "Fences are something you take very much for granted. As opposed to post and wire, stone walls are very visible. They dramatise the property ownership that occurred with European occupation." David Moloney. Feb 2002 Consultant Melton Heritage Study. Photography – Raelene Marshall



This example of dry stone walling is part of the extensive complex of intact walls at the Moylans' 'Mt Kororoit' farm. Note the unusual wall construction and placement of 'cope' stones on top. The fascinating history of this property was supplied by local farmer Charlie Finch who has lived there since his childhood. Photography – David Moloney

1838 The Pyke Brothers settled on land at the Toolern Creek, then known as Pennyroyal Creek. They were considered to be the first European settlers in Melton.

William Cross Yuille was one of the earlier settlers in the area known as Rockbank. He had Pre-emptive rights to 640 acres in early 1850's. A large bluestone shearing shed was built on the property later known as Deanside registered with the National Trust

1852 A site was marked out for a Village which became Melton. In 1862 it became a Postal Village with a church, school, stores and hotels and was now a flourishing pastoral and agricultural district of just over 29,542 hectares.

1865 Dairy farmers in the district suffered an outbreak of the deadly Pleural Pneumonia which killed many cattle, and later the same year, bush fires swept in from the ranges, destroying a number of properties.

1884 The railway came from Melbourne to Melton. A viaduct was commenced over the Werribee Gorge and was completed in 1886 linking Melton to Bacchus Marsh and Ballarat.

1916 Melton Reservoir (or Exford Weir) was constructed, and later enlarged in 1937.

1963 A reticulated water supply was officially opened, by 1972, homes in Melton, Toolern Vale, and Rockbank were receiving treated water.

1974 Melton was declared a Satellite City. Melton Township sees unprecedented residential growth for the next ten years.

1987 The Melton By-pass (Western Freeway) was opened, Digger's Rest By-pass (Calder Highway) was opened 1993.

1988 Melton and Rockbank's sewerage system was completed.

1994 Council amalgamations reshape Victoria, with the vast pastures of Exford now located in the south-western area of the Shire. The Shire contains the townships of Melton, Diggers Rest, Rockbank and Toolern Vale.

2002 Melton Shire continues its rapid residential expansion in the new suburbs of Burnside, Caroline Springs, and Hillside on the fringe of Melbourne.

Source
1. Kellaway, C, Dr. **Lands Dept. Selection File 413/31**, Parish of Kororoit, Public Records Office of Victoria VPRS 627/P

