

Clontarf Homestead, 4 Wallace Street, Meredith Statement of Significance (Lorraine Huddle Heritage Consultant May 2022)

Heritage Place:	Clontarf Homestead, 4 Wallace Street, Meredith	PS ref no:	HO174
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What is significant?

The homestead known as Clontarf at 4 Wallace Street Meredith including the Victorian Regency styled house and the Federation Georgian house attached behind it, and the stable and buggy shed, are significant to the town of Meredith. The important form, materials and detailing as noted in the report are significant.

All other outbuildings are not significant.

How is it significant?

The homestead known as Clontarf (pre 1884 house, c1900 house and early stables and buggy shed with timber paling shingles) is locally significant for its historical and aesthetic values to the Meredith in Golden Plains Shire.

Why is it significant?

The homestead known as Clontarf is **historically significant at a local level** as it has a long and clear association with the period of Meredith's development as a country township from the mid Victorian period when Meredith was an important town on the track from the port of Geelong to the Ballarat and Buninyong goldfields. Clontarf is an early house from the Victorian era, and strongly associated with two prominent Meredith families, O'Brien and Wells, who made an influential contribution to the Meredith community over a period of 183 years, from at least 1884 - 2021, however documentary evidence and physical evidence show the Victorian Regency house to be older than 1884. It is set in the corner and on the front title boundary of the very large area of land, indicating that it may have provided lodgings for travellers when first built there prior to 1884.

Henry O'Brien, born in Clontarf, Dublin, Ireland was active in Meredith from 1860 to 1905 and called tenders to 'repair' a cottage in 1884, possibly in preparation for his marriage the following year, after which he and his wife Helena lived there. The word CONTARF is painted on the top-light, above the front door. It was noted in 1905 that Henry O'Brien also had an "enclosed wooden stable and buggy shed, very old" on the property which is likely to be the outbuilding with roof cladding of timber paling shingles.

Henry O'Brien ran a hay and corner store in 1871 and amassed a large portfolio of land and properties in Meredith and the outlying areas. After the death of his business partner, Thomas Connor in 1888, Henry continued to operate as a general storekeeper. He opened a new store on the northeast corner of Wallace and Staughton Streets in 1890, and in January 1900 Henry was appointed as a Justice of the Peace.

After both Henry (1905) and Helena (1921) died, childless the property changed hands on various occasions over the next four years until it was purchased by the Wells family in 1925.

Alfred Ernest Wells, known as a grazier from Meredith, purchased the two-acre property in 1925. Alfred married Elsie Caroline Synot in 1918. This was an important local wedding, as Elsie was the daughter of Meredith farmer and Councillor, John Synot. Alfred and Elise welcomed the births of four children over the ensuing seven years. Like his parents before him, Alfred involved himself in community and civic activities in Meredith. Historically, sporting clubs have dominated a major role in rural communities and Meredith was no different from other regions of Australia. At the Meredith Shooting Club during the winter of 1919, Alfred was the successful recipient of the novice trophy. The following year, Alfred was part of the organising committee of the Meredith Amateur Turf Club Annual Races in 1920. His involvement with the turf club was maintained for years to come. Alfred was also a keen footballer and continued to play with the Meredith team for many years after his wedding.

When subscriptions were called to support the erection of a memorial to the local fallen soldiers during the Great War, Alfred duly responded. In 1928 Alfred was appointed Chairman of the newly formed school committee.

Alfred Ernest Wells was a member of the Meredith Masonic Lodge. He was a pallbearer for a fallen brother in 1924, at which time he held the position of "W. M." As a 'Worshipful Master', Alfred was a senior officer of the lodge.

In 1930 the Country Roads Board decided to widen and realign the main thoroughfare from Geelong to Ballarat. In Meredith, the 90° angle of the corner of Wallace and Sutherland Streets was redesigned to a curve. To accommodate this restructure, part of the Wells property was forcibly acquired on 9 October 1930. It is thought that the funds provided to Alfred Wells allowed him the opportunity to increase the size of his family home. According to the Meredith History Interest Group, Alfred and his family moved into the Meredith township in 1925 so their children could easily to school. It is a 15km trip from Bamganie to Meredith, after which, in 1930, they relocated the second house from the Wells family farm "Castlewood" at Bamganie, south of Meredith and renovated the interior of both houses so that they functioned as one house internally, thus increasing the overall value of the property. It was very common for timber buildings to be relocated during the Victorian era, and there are many examples of this in Meredith. The second home was likely to have been constructed circa 1900 at Bamganie, south of Meredith and moved to the back of the house at 4 Wallace St to enlarge the front house in 1930 when the rateable value of the property increased substantially even though the size of the land was diminished at that time. Facing Mercer Street, the second house joins the west side of the original building by a central wall. Other renovations at this time included the walls and ceilings of both houses being lined with cement sheet or masonite (with asbestos? which was readily available in the 1930s).

By at least 1947 Alfred was an officer of the Rural Fire Brigade, holding the position of Lieutenant and was tasked with the responsibility of equipment officer. During the 1950s he was a keen golfer, as was his daughter Lorna and he fulfilled the position of club president in 1949. Community involvement continued when Alfred attended the Meredith RSL Ball with his wife Elsie and daughter Lorna in 1954. Elsie and Lorna were photographed with other local ladies, watching the activities on the dance floor (Figure 24).

Alfred's endeavours extended beyond these passions, and he followed the guidance of his father-in-law by representing the people of Meredith and Bannockburn on the local council. Alfred was a successful candidate in the Bannockburn Municipal elections in August 1946, representing the Meredith Riding. Continuing as a councillor for many years, Alfred was elected as Bannockburn Shire President in September 1953 and was granted an allowance of £90. Alfred retired from local council activities in 1955 and died in 1972.

The last Wells family member, Lionel lived all his life in Meredith, ran a business as a carter and continued to live there as a bachelor until he died in 2021. Today the private residence is vacant and has been vandalised with floor boards removed via closed windows rendering many of them broken.

(Criteria A & H)

The homestead known as Contarf is aesthetically significant at a local level as a pair of buildings, built in the Victorian Regency style and Federation Georgian style. This Regency style was mainly used in

NSW and Tasmania in the early 1800s and less common in Victoria which was settled after 1837. The architecture has an elegant plainness with simple forms and sparse classical details typical of the Victorian Regency style. The significant Regency styled architectural elements of the building include the symmetrical facade with encircling verandah, the low pitched hip roof, self supporting concave corrugated iron verandah roof, twelve paned timber sash windows with fine timber glazing bars, and the elegant timber valance between the decorative timber verandah columns and the elegant timber fireplace surrounds. The upper parts of the weatherboard cladding, are very early, as 'chew' marks indicate some may have been locally steam milled or spot milled sawn timbers.

The fabric and style which is typical of the 1880s late Victorian era (indicating work which may have been done when the cottage was repaired in 1884), include the moulded top of the unpainted rendered chimney, the window and door frames, the colonnade of classical chamfered timber posts with timber capitals, timber panelled front door with glazing to the highlight with the name of the house "CLONTARF" hand painted on the glass.

The fabric and style which is typical of the Federation Georgian style includes the hipped roof clad in galvanised corrugated iron, convex bull-nose verandah clad with galvanised corrugated iron, exposed eaves rafters, unpainted red brick chimneys, symmetrical front facade, 2 pane double hung timber windows, front doorway.

The views of the historic pair of houses as seen along Wallace Street is significant as a unique and strong visual historic marker, particularly looking north along Wallace Street to the intersection of Mercer st.

(Criterion E)

Notes:

The interior walls and ceilings of both houses appear to be lined with asbestos cement or masonite sheets most likely installed in 1930 when the Wells family would have received compensation for a large portion of their land. The 90 degree corner of Wallace and Sutherland Streets on the route between Geelong and Ballarat was compulsorily acquired by the Country Roads Board to realign it into a sweeping curve. Asbestos was first introduced into Australian homes in the 1920s being at its peak in the 1940s. Although the interior has Victorian Regency styled timber fireplace surrounds worthy of retention, overall the interior has been substantially altered with parts of the timber floors having been removed recently and noting that the asbestos lining is unviable. Therefore the interior is not recommended for heritage controls and it will not be discussed in detail in this report.

The infilled structure on the south elevation verandah of the pre 1884 house is not significant.

The former stables and buggy shed with timber paling roof cladding is in very poor to ruinous condition and so it is recommended that measured drawings to scale 1:50 be cross-referenced to detailed and annotated photos. After the submission of this documentation, to the satisfaction of the Shire's Heritage Advisor, a copyright free copy should be lodged at the local heritage society, as well as Council and a demolition permit issued.)

Primary source

Clontarf Homestead, 4 Wallace Street, Meredith Heritage Assessment (Lorraine Huddle Heritage Consultant May 2022)

Number	Address	Grade
4	Wallace Street Meredith	Contributory