Location

Thomas Street

Review

Andrew Ward's Whitehorse Heritage Review 2001 identified Thomas Street as a potential Heritage Overlay Precinct. Graeme Butler's City of Whitehorse Heritage Review: Heritage Overlay Precincts 2002 confirmed the precincts worthiness for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay.

History

Selection and Settlement

Crown land was first released for sale in the Parish of Nunawading in 1854 but it was not until after the passing of an Act commonly known as the Grant Act in 1865 that the area that is now Thomas Street and its surrounds in CA 127 were settled.

Through this Act James Grant, the Minister for Lands aimed to shift land from the grip of squatters into the hands of small-scale settlers[8]. Clause 42 of that Act impacted on settlement in Nunawading in an unexpected way.

Designed to help struggling miners Clause 42 allowed for annual occupation licences to be issued for lots of up to twenty acres within ten miles of a gold field. The "legal umbrella for land development in Nunawading"[9] came by way of its proximity to the Anderson's Creek diggings at Warrandyte. As a result "an explosion of settlement took place"[10] in Nunawading but not by miners.

The 42nd selectors as they became known were mostly farmers but there were also wood carters, landless labourers, a gentleman, nurseryman, and a few described as illiterate - a farmer, labourer and gardener. Most of them came from the nearby districts of Box Hill, Hawthorn and Doncaster[11]. They engaged in mixed farming, their lots "usually including dairies, fowl houses, piggeries, stables, barns and almost without exception one or more waterholes on each allotment".[12] Their ventures were remarkably successful considering the soil they worked was regarded as among the poorest in Victoria[13].

The Cook family

William Cook a Box Hill farmer[14] selected the maximum licences and acreage allowed under Clause 42, that is four 20 acre licences totally eighty acres. Ownership became possible by way of a subsequent Act in 1869. His selection was almost as east as one could go in territory that was administered by the Nunawading District Roads Board.

[8] Niall Brennan, The History of Nunawading, The Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1972, p.22-23.
[9] ibid. p.38.
[10] ibid. p.23.
[11] K.A.Patterson, "Launching the Land Rush", in manuscript, Latrobe Library quoted in Brennan, pp.37-38.
[12] ibid. p.38-39.
[13] Brennan, pp.34 & 38.
[14] ibid. p.37.

As CA 127A his land had frontage to the north side of Whitehorse Road and sloped down towards Deep Creek. His immediate neighbours included August Schwerkolt and fellow 42 selectors Frank Ainger and Philip Cummins. His licence to this land was first recorded in the District Roads Board Book of April 1868 as owner/occupant at "Deep Creek, 80 acres of land, NAV 11 pounds"[15]. At the time he retained a house and 70 acres of land in Whitehorse Road which he had owned since 1863 and possibly earlier.

Described generally as a farmer there are references to Cook and family which indicate quarrying activities[16]. Roads Board assessments tracked ownership from William to Thomas Cook in 1870 and from Thomas to Mrs.Cook in 1871[17] when payments were completed and Crown grants issued, in this case transferred[18]. A.Cook appears on Parish plans as grantee 23 May 1871[19] this being Amee Cook, farmer with house and 70 acres on Whitehorse Road and 80 acres of land, Deep Creek[20].

Amee Cook's name was replaced in the Rate Books by Thomas, William and John Joseph Cook by 1885. Thomas owned a "House & 68¾ acres land Blackburne" NAV 75 pounds which was probably the original family farm. This farm at Mitcham passed to William and John each having 40 acres of land with a house[21]. They were all farmers.

By 1888 Thomas Cook no longer occupied the family property however the Mitcham farms remained in the hands of William and John Cook who by then were described as gardeners[22].

The 1880s brought new activity to Mitcham with the building of the railway line to Ringwood in 1882 and the emergence of brickworks. William Cook seemed to diversify during this period building two houses on Whitehorse Road which he let to William Batty, brick worker and John McLeod, labourer.

This was the height of the land boom and opportunists subdivided where they could so that even in this "outlying suburb"[23] the auctioneer's hammer could be heard. Close by on the north side of Whitehorse Road the Mitcham Township Estate and the Mitcham Estate wooed would be settlers and the Blackburn and Tunstall Property Company spread its claws north and south of the railway line[24].

By 1892 the property CA 127 of the 42 selector Frank Ainger was in the hands of the Imperial Banking Company[25]. There continued however a rural aspect to the township with many small holdings like Cooks' surviving. Rate Books indicate that at this time William Cook was absent from his property and that John Cook was engaged in carting[26].

William Cook returned by 1900 and "settled on his orchard …where he specialized in cherries to such an extent that he became known as the 'Cherry King'". He continued with this occupation until his death in 1939 Cherry Court recalling the work a "bluff, hearty man of extreme good nature…"[27] with links to Mitcham's early days.

John Cook was not recorded as being in the district in 1900[28] so activity associated with his farm at that time is unknown. His western portion of the original selection where Thomas Street runs was in the hands of his executors around the out break of war in 1914[29]. Thomas Cook now a Box Hill resident was his beneficiary but the property soon transferred to

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[15] BHHS, Assessment of the District Roads Board, 1868, assessment no.25.
[16] Julia Morant & O.S.Green, Box Hill Sketchbook, Rigby Ltd, Adelaide, 1978, p.12 '…Thomas Cook, a member of the family which owned a Mitcham quarry…' and Brennan, p.95 'Cook's quarry at Mitcham…belong to an early period'. Brennan's reference is embedded in discussion on clay quarries and small one-man establishments.
[17] BHHS, Assessment of the District Roads Board, 1870, assessment no.30 & 1871, assessment no.30.
[18] Patterson in Brennan, p.38.
[19] Box Hill Historical Society Inc. (BHHS), plan Parish of Nunawading, County of Bourke, nd.
[20] BHHS, Shire of Nunawading Rate Book, 1875, North Riding, assessment nos.29 & 30.
[21] ibid. 1885, assessment nos.33, 34, 36. Also recorded - John Cook, house & 23 acres Mitcham CA 127C which was subdivided by 1892 as the Mitcham Township Estate (between Mitcham/Doncaster East Roads)
[22] ibid. 1888, assessment no.90-93.
[23] Brennan, p.94.
[24] Copy of map, "Parish of Nunawading" dated 26 November 1892 in Brennan, pp.62-63.
[25] ibid.
[26] Rate Book 1890, North Riding, p.47.
[27] ibid.
[28] BHHS, Sands and McDougall Directory 1900, p.381.
[29] Rate Book 1914, Mitcham Riding, p.30.

Thomas' wife Rachael Ann Cook. At the time there was a house on 35 acres leased to Richard Callahan a blacksmith and a house on 5 acres leased to William Charles Draper a green grocer[30].

Mitcham in 1914

At the time of Cook's subdivision the 1914 Rate Book for Mitcham Riding[31] revealed the main concentration of population in Mitcham was spread along Whitehorse and Mitcham Roads, where they intersected and clustered towards the train station. It was not a densely populated town. Housing estates created in the previous century such as Mitcham Estate Part B and the Mitcham Township Estate still had oodles of undeveloped lots. Section A of the former which created 87 lots in the Edward and Albert Streets area had given rise to 17 houses and the latter centred round McDowall Street with 163 lots had realised 16 houses.

In an area renown for its clay based industry almost without exception houses were timber although a handful of wattle and daub places survived, a couple of huts and a cement house. A few brick places existed including public buildings such as the State School in Mitcham Road and a hall in Britannia Street. There was also a blacksmithy of iron.

New places were built in 1914 including 2 wood shops in Railway Reserve and a brick office owned by Patrick Joseph Markham.

The Municipal Directory described Mitcham as a "Growing township…Residential and fruit growing…Population 1093" in 1915. This was about one third the population of Box Hill which was described as a "Flourishing suburban township". Nevertheless it was lit by electricity and had much sought after essential services – "a post, telegraph, telephone and money-order office, State school, three churches, public hall, police station, two hotels, tile works, cool stores for fruit[32].

Thomas Street

The southern section of John Cook's farm was subdivided in August 1914 creating Thomas Street and Cook Road[33]. Amendments made to the plan included the termination of the Harrison Street extension at Thomas Street instead of Cook Road. The subdivision of 78 lots appeared in the main body of the Rate Books in January 1916[34] with most blocks measuring 50 by about 190 feet. At the time the entire Estate was owned by Rachael Cook with just two houses these being the old farm houses on lots 1 to 3 in Whitehorse Road now nos.583-587 since removed and on lot 51 in Cook Road. These places were let to Mrs.Featherstone and John Draper respectively.

The Estate sold slowly at first however the elevated site would have presented a pretty picture especially in spring with William Cook's cherry orchard in blossom and the Dandenongs in the background. The first two houses emerged in Thomas Street in 1918 on the west side overlooking this vista.

On lots 5 and 6 now no.32 William White of Ivanhoe built a wood house with 3 rooms which he sold to one Phillips in 1920. By 1930 it was owned and occupied by John McCallum "gentleman" and was extended to 5 rooms of "W/FC" possibly wood and fibro cement. On lot 9 Norman Valentine Hill, joiner also built a wood house with 3 rooms which in 1922 he sold to Clement Victor Rogers, a dental mechanic. Rogers subsequently bought the adjoining lots 7-11 giving him the blocks between no.32 and Harrison Street. This house at no.26 has since been removed[35].

Land sales improved dramatically after the War and with the new decade came further development. By 1922 on the west side there were houses at no.6 Frederick Witt, mechanic, W3 and no.10 Leslie Cooper, builder, W4. On the east there were houses at no.5 Russell Prescott, no.7 Albert Grundy, driver/builder, W4 unfinished, no.21 William Charles Briggs, carpenter, W5 and no.33 Thomas James Edwards, tile worker, W4 giving a total of 8 houses in the street[36].

From that time on development along east side was steady with all lots being built on by the early 1930s. Between 1922 and 1927 houses were built at nos.3, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31, 35. All of these houses were wood with three or

[30] ibid.
[31] Rate Book 1914, Mitcham Riding, passim.
[32] BHHS, Victorian Municipal Directory, 50th Edition, 1915.
[33] WHS, ND 834 (part), Lodge Plan no.6626 declared 8 August 1914.
[34] Rate Book 1916, Mitcham Riding, pp.30-34.
[35] BHHS Rate Books, Mitcham Riding, 1918, pp.40-41 & 1920, pp.41-41. Also PROV, VPRS 8113/P1, Rate Books Shire of Nunawading Mitcham Riding, Unit 3, 1921-22, p.15*ff* & Shire of Blackburn & Mitcham, Unit 20, 1930-31, pp.102-103.
[36] PROV, VPRS 8113/P1, Rate Books Shire of Nunawading Mitcham Riding, Unit 3, 1921-22, p.15*ff*.

four rooms and most of the residents were owner/occupants. Their occupations ranged from home duties to telephonist, rubber worker, clerk, builder (Thomas James Edwards no.31) and boot maker. Of the two remaining blocks, no.37 Vincent Gerard Keleher, government servant, W4 was built by 1931 and no.1 Doris Vivian Meagher built her house in 1931[37].

The west side of Thomas Street by contrast was less densely developed there being several owners with more than one block. At the southern end one house emerged between 1922 and 1927 at no.30. At the same time a house was built north of Harrison Street at nos.2. By 1931 only one other house was built, no.16 now demolished. These houses were wood with three or four rooms and generally owner/occupied. Among the residents were two railway employees, a mechanic and at no.6 an artist named Mrs.Gertrude Mountford[38].

The pattern of development remained the same in 1940 when the street was depicted on the MMBW plan 273[39]. Cook Street now Road was well established and William Cook's orchard to the east with two houses and dam depicted as they would have been when his daughter Amy Cook inherited them in August the previous year.

Description

The Thomas Street heritage precinct contains a majority of relatively well preserved late Edwardian and inter- war era houses. Generally the housing style is more humble in nature than the Edwardian and inter- war bungalows seen in the Mont Albert, Surrey Hills and Box Hill areas, in relation to size and detailing. Nearly all of the houses in the street are weatherboard with similar set backs, heights and level of detail, giving the street a consistent and homogeneous appearance. As the history has revealed, most of the houses would have originally been of a similar size, consisting of three or four main rooms. A number of the houses have been subdivided to the rear and contain another dwelling behind the Thomas Street dwelling. Generally these are not visible from the street.
Below is a list of the common characteristics of houses in the precinct:

- Late Edwardian and inter-war housing generally in the California Bungalow style
- Single storey detached housing.
- Wall finishes mainly weatherboard with a few exceptions of stucco, face red brick and combinations.
- Terracotta Marseilles pattern tiles and corrugated iron are used for the hipped and gabled roof forms
- Expressed chimneys
- Timber framed windows, typically making up less than 50% of any associated wall surface
- Front porches used at the front entry, differing in form with each style
- Driveways to one side of the house leading to a garage near or at the rear boundary, with single crossover
- Generally low pier and panel masonry fences with some reconstructed timber framed wire fabric fences and timber picket fences for the Californian Bungalow style houses

Statement of Significance

What is significant?
The Thomas Street heritage precinct, comprising the properties with a frontage to Thomas Street including houses, other buildings, elements, fences and fabric remaining from the late Edwardian and the inter-war period.

How is it significant?
The Thomas Street heritage precinct is of local historic and aesthetic significance to the City of Whitehorse.

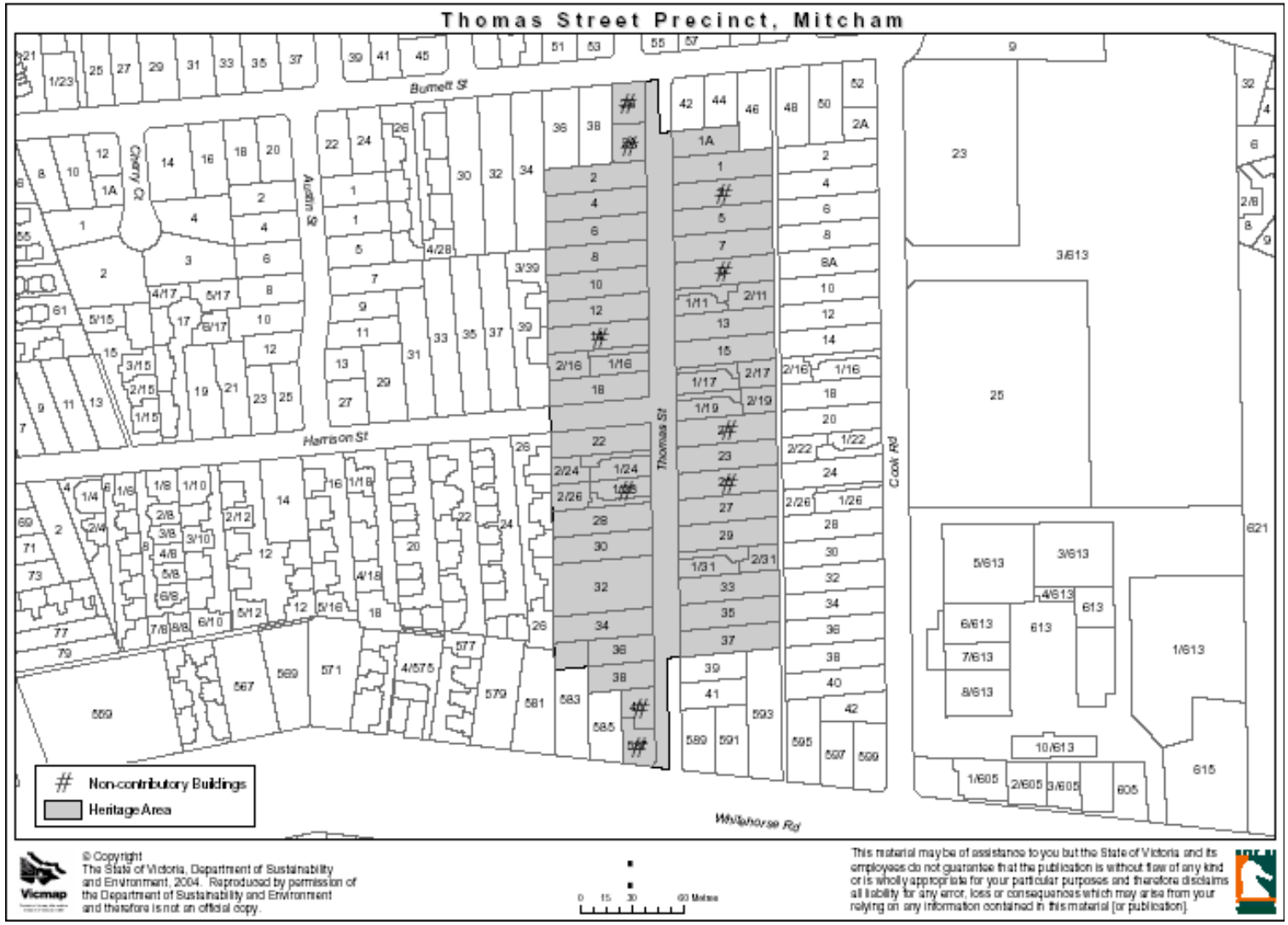
Why is it significant?
The Thomas Street heritage precinct is of aesthetic and historical significance to the City of Whitehorse as a good expression of the major growth in housing in Mitcham during the late Edwardian and particularly the immediate post World War One era, as expressed by single storey detached largely Californian Bungalow style housing (Criterion A4 & Criterion E).

[37] ibid. & Unit 9, 1926-27, p.24-25.
[38] ibid.
[39] PROV, VPRS 8604/P2, Unit 1, MMBW plans 273, 160:1, Blackburn, Mitcham, Doncaster, Templestowe, dated 1940.

Thomas Street Precinct, Mitcham

The Thomas Street heritage precinct is of historical importance for its associations with the Cook family who were prominent landowners and settlers in the Mitcham area. (Criterion H)

The Thomas Street heritage precinct is of historical significance as it represents the transition period in which the Mitcham area developed from a rural township to a more suburban township after electrification of the railway line and the expansion of the civic centre. The street is typical of the type of housing found in Blackburn, Nunawading and Mitcham constructed during the major development years of those suburbs. This boom development was later than the suburbs of Mont Albert, Surrey Hills and Box Hill which are all closer to the city. (Criterion A4, C2)

The Thomas Street heritage precinct has aesthetic and historical significance as an intact streetscape of late Edwardian and inter-war housing. It is rare to find such an intact precinct in the outer suburbs of the City of Whitehorse. The houses in the street are good representative examples of the more humble and working class houses of the late Edwardian and inter-war housing styles reflecting the lives of the working class residents who settled in the Mitcham area. (Criterion A4, E) The street is of aesthetic significance as it contains houses with similar set backs, materials, forms and levels of detailing giving the streetscape a consistent and unified appearance. (Criterion E)

Thomas Street Precinct, Mitcham