

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

Name: Nissen Hut

Address: 1232-1290 Beattys Road, Grangefields, Victoria

Place Type: Agricultural

Citation Date: 2023

Recommended Heritage Protection

Victorian Heritage Register – No

Victorian Heritage Inventory – No

Planning Scheme – Yes

Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

The Nissen Hut at 1232 - 1290 Beattys Road, Grangefields is significant. The hut is one of the few remaining Nissen Huts in good condition in Victoria and the last known surviving Nissen hut in the City of Melton. The Nissen Hut was likely constructed during World War II when they were commonly used by the military for accommodation of personnel. When the war ended, the huts were used for migrant hostel accommodation, acquired by community groups for use as meeting places or were repurposed as farm buildings. The hut was most likely placed on the property in the mid- to late 1950s and is visible in aerial photographs from the 1960s.

The significance of the Nissen Hut is shown through the rarity of the structure within Melton. The overall curved corrugated iron form on a raised timber base, the timber doors on all elevations of the structure, the timber flooring and the timber beams which elevate the hut off the ground, the timber stockyards and electrical switchboard are significant.

How is it Significant?

The site is of historical significance to the City of Melton (Criterion A).

The site is significant to the City of Melton as a rare surviving example of a Nissen Hut in the municipality (Criterion B).

The site is of representative significance to the City of Melton (Criterion D).

Why is it Significant?

The Nissen Hut at 1232 - 1290 Beattys Road, Grangefields is of historical significance because of its fabric, which demonstrates the history of post-war agriculture in Melton. (Criterion A).

The corrugated iron sheeting which forms the body and ends of the hut is likely to be original, as are the internal ribs and timber flooring. There are other materials present such as fibreglass sheeting which may be later additions. The Nissen hut sits atop hardwood supports which may not be part of the original structure. The timber stockyards are later additions, added once the hut had been placed in its present location; they are considered to be of contributory significance as they demonstrate the use of the hut as a farm building and tie it to the agricultural/pastoral history of the region. Other later additions include the electrical switchboard on the southern elevation of the hut. Not all fittings and fixtures are original fabric with obvious examples including new bolts.

Repurposing of Nissen huts as accommodation, farm and storage buildings was common following the end of the World War II and at least eight were acquired and used in the Melton area. The *Melton Express* reported in January 1954 that the government was having a disposal sale of Nissen huts in Werribee and that 'bargain-seekers from Melton' had been buying them. *The Express* also reported that the Legion of Ex-Servicemen intended to convert one into a club room in Melton South (*Melton Express* 30 January 1954: 5).

This hut is most likely one of those purchased from Werribee. It is visible in aerial photographs of the property dating to 1968.

The Nissen Hut at 1232-1290 Beattys Road, Grangefields is significant to the City of Melton being a rare surviving example of this type of building within the municipality. These structures were previously found throughout Melton and Rockbank; however, this is the last known hut of its type in the area (Criterion B).

The site is of representative significance to the City of Melton. The Nissen Hut at 1232-1290 Beatty Road, Grangefields, is good example of a Nissen hut which has been converted to a farm building. The hut is in a highly visible location and demonstrates the characteristic curved form and features of other Nissen huts which have been documented in Melton and elsewhere throughout Victoria (Criterion D).

Physical Description

The Nissen Hut is a road facing structure acquired by the Missen family, with the hut being visible in aerial photographs of the property from 1968. The Nissen Hut at 1232 - 1290 Beattys Road, Grangefields, has been used as a shearing shed but is now being used for storage.

The hut is approximately 13 m in length and has no windows; however, there are double doors made of timber on each of the northern and southern ends of the hut, and a central single dormer door on the western and eastern elevations of the hut. A timber stock ramp has been added on the south side of the hut. The hut is elevated approximately 1 m off the ground by means of hardwood timber beams (Plates 1 - 3). There is an electrical meter box attached to the southern end of the Nissen hut, likely associated with its use as a shearing shed and as accommodation.



Plate 1: Study area facing south-east showing Nissen Hut at 1232-1290 Beattys Road (Photograph by G. Polic 12.05.2022)



Plate 2: Study area facing east showing Nissen Hut at 1232-1290 Beattys Road (Photograph by G. Polic 12.05.2022)



Plate 3: Study area facing south-west showing Nissen Hut at 1232-1290 Beattys Road (Photograph by M. Filihia 12.05.2022)

The hut is clad with corrugated iron which is attached to the frame by means of nails with cut squares of flashing to form a seal; recent repairs have been made using hex head roofing nails. At the ends of the hut, the corrugated iron sheeting has been folded over and cut to make it pliable enough to follow the curved design of the hut (Plates 4 - 5). There has been some use of fibreglass roof sheeting to supplement the corrugated iron (see Plate 3 above); this material dates to c.1938 but is likely to have been attached to the hut once it was in its current location c. mid-1960s. A variety of fastenings have been used on the doors, including strap hinges on the southern double doors and ball-bearing hinges on other doors (Plate 7).

The structure is in fair condition, albeit likely in a modified configuration from its original structure. The temporary nature of the structure is evident through its being placed on the exposed raised timber base, which itself has signs of decomposition such as unattached planks and damaged timber. The fabric of the Nissen Hut, namely timber and corrugated iron, and the fact that such huts are designed to be easily taken apart has the capacity to impact the integrity of the structure over time.



Plate 4: Detail showing the fastenings used in the hut's construction (Photograph by M. Filihia 12.05.2022)



Plate 5: Study area facing south-west showing the double door on the northern elevation of the Nissen hut (Photograph by M. Filihia 12.05.2022).



Plate 6: Study area facing north-east showing the dormer door in the western elevation of the hut (Photograph by M. Filihia 12.05.2022).



Plate 7: Study area facing north-east showing the double door with strap hinges in the southern elevation of the hut (Photograph by M. Filihia 12.05.2022).

Although there is an electrical meter connected to the hut (Plate 14) there does not appear to be any equipment associated with shearing remaining inside. The path of the electrical wiring can be traced but the hut is now filled with old blankets, tarpaulins and pallets. It is likely that the hut has been used more recently for accommodation as a refrigerator, vanity and mirror were observed at the southern end of the hut (Plate 8). No makers' marks were visible on iron in the interior of the Nissen hut. The evidence of the use of the Nissen hut for shearing includes the addition of a timber ramp into the hut and a second ramp with timber paling fence on the southern elevation of the Nissen hut. In addition, stockyards have been created through the use of steel and wire fencing panels of various types; these are located on the southern elevation of the hut and are shown in Plates 9 and 10.



Plate 8: View inside the Nissen hut facing south showing stored materials and domestic furniture within. Note the mirror on the far wall (Photograph by G. Polic 12.05.2022).



Plate 9: Study area facing south-west showing stockyards made from a variety of fencing. Note the timber ramp with loose planks into the Nissen hut (Photograph by M. Filihia 12.05.2022).



Plate 10: View of the Nissen hut facing east showing the timber ramp and stockyards created from a farm gate and more recent wire fencing on the Beattys Road boundary of the property (Photograph by M. Filihia 12.05.2022).

History

Regional History

The western areas of Melbourne were settled following Hume and Hovell's appraisal of the farming land in 1824. Their report of the land's potential for grazing generated particular interest from people in Van Diemen's Land where opportunities for pastoral expansion were running out. They also provided some of the first strides in early European settlement within the western plains. John Batman's 1835 tour of the area encouraged an influx of settlers from Van Diemen's Land. Harbours at Melbourne, Williamstown and Geelong were founded as the squatters rushed to claim their share of the open volcanic plains to the west and north of Port Phillip Bay (Shillinglaw 1972: 27).

Pastoralism was the oldest and most important industry of the Melton and Rockbank regions. The plains between the Maribyrnong and Werribee Rivers became the foundation of a rush for sheep-runs. Squatters established rough 'stations' and 'outstations' in the region, mostly along watercourses. The most important pioneering sheep-run in Melton was John Aitken's Mt Aitken Station, situated on the Eastern Branch of Kororoit Creek near Diggers Rest (Moloney et al. 2008), although some of Victoria's earliest and most notable runs were established in the Melton and Rockbank area, including the Exford Homestead and the Green Hills Station. Homesteads, outbuildings and landscapes associated with these three large pastoral estates still survive. Archaeological evidence for early pastoralism in Melton may also survive at other stations, such as the squatting runs of Watton, Pinkerton, Clarke, Robertson

or Pyke. In addition to homestead ruins, the outbuildings and associated features (such as stone dams and drainage works) can also be found in the landscape. A total of over 165 km of drystone walls can be seen throughout the region (Planning Collaborative (Vic) Pty Ltd: 15).

During the 1850s, land in the Melton and Rockbank region was sold by the Crown. As a result, the Port Phillip district was soon dominated by three landowners: the Clarkes, the Chirnsides and Staughtons. Staughton acquired two new estates within the Melton-Eynesbury and Brooklyn/Nerowie areas (Peel 1974: 56, 133, 129-131). Figure 1 shows the extent of the lands in and around the site area which were owned by Rupert Havelock Clarke in 1899; all land coloured either purple or red was owned by him.

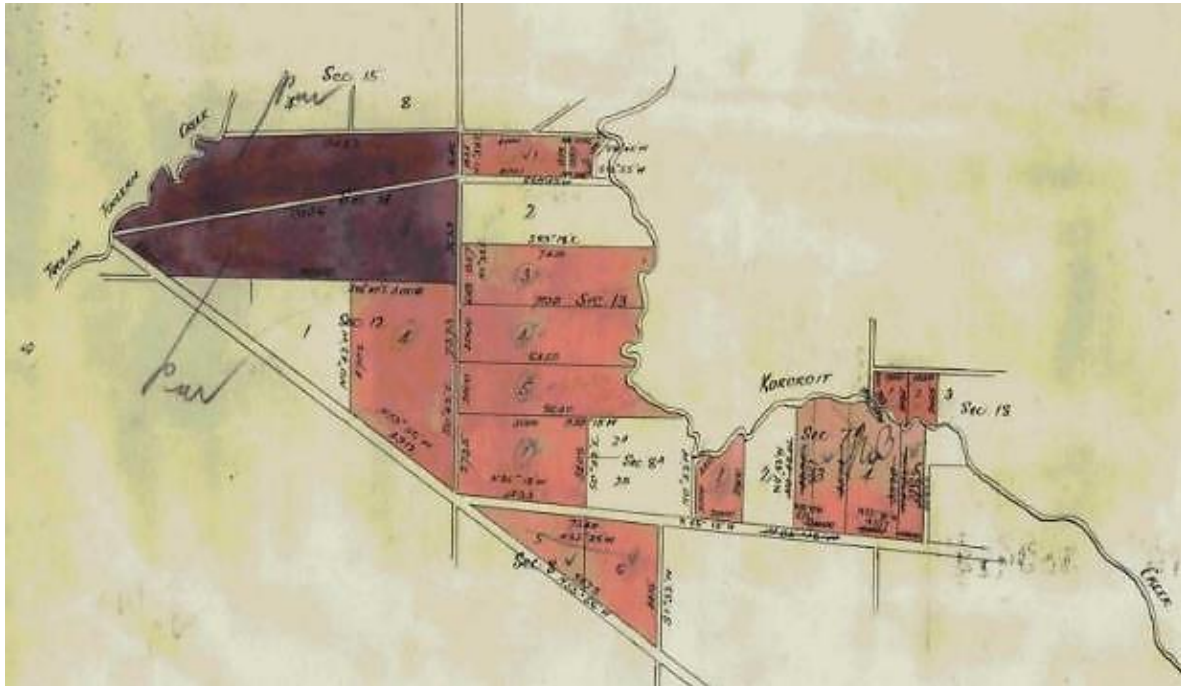


Figure 1: Image taken from Title issued in 1899 showing the extent of the land that was owned by Rupert Turner Havelock Clarke (Source: Landata 2022)

The Missen family were pioneers of the Melton area. George and Mary Missen with their family group of Jessie, Harriet, Mary, Thomas, George, Hannah and Charlotte relocated from Great Thurlow, Sussex and arrived in Victor Harbour in South Australia in 1853, before moving overland in the early 1860s and purchasing Crown Land within the Parish of Kororoit (Moloney et al. 2006). These Crown Land landholdings were swampy and forested, with swamplier land located to the east of Melton being sold at a large gathering described by Hjorth as a 'great Fair', (Hjorth 2001). One land ballot, containing the lease of 287.5 acres in 1867 was obtained by 'George Missen the younger' (Board of Land and Works 1867). The family continued to obtain land within this area; in the 1870s, George Missen Senior was able to apply for freehold grantings to other allotments which, when combined with the Younger George's holdings, exceeded 535 acres in total (Parish Plan, Parish of Kororoit). These holdings when combined and shared with other family members who received their own grants, resulted in the Missen family owning land within the Melton region (Starr 1985), including in Rockbank and as far afield as in Tarneit in Wyndham (Filihia 2023). The Missens were engaged in the industries of dairying, hay making, poultry and pig raising and carting produce to Melbourne.

Later parish maps show the gradual transfer of land to other landowners in smaller parcels (Figure 2).

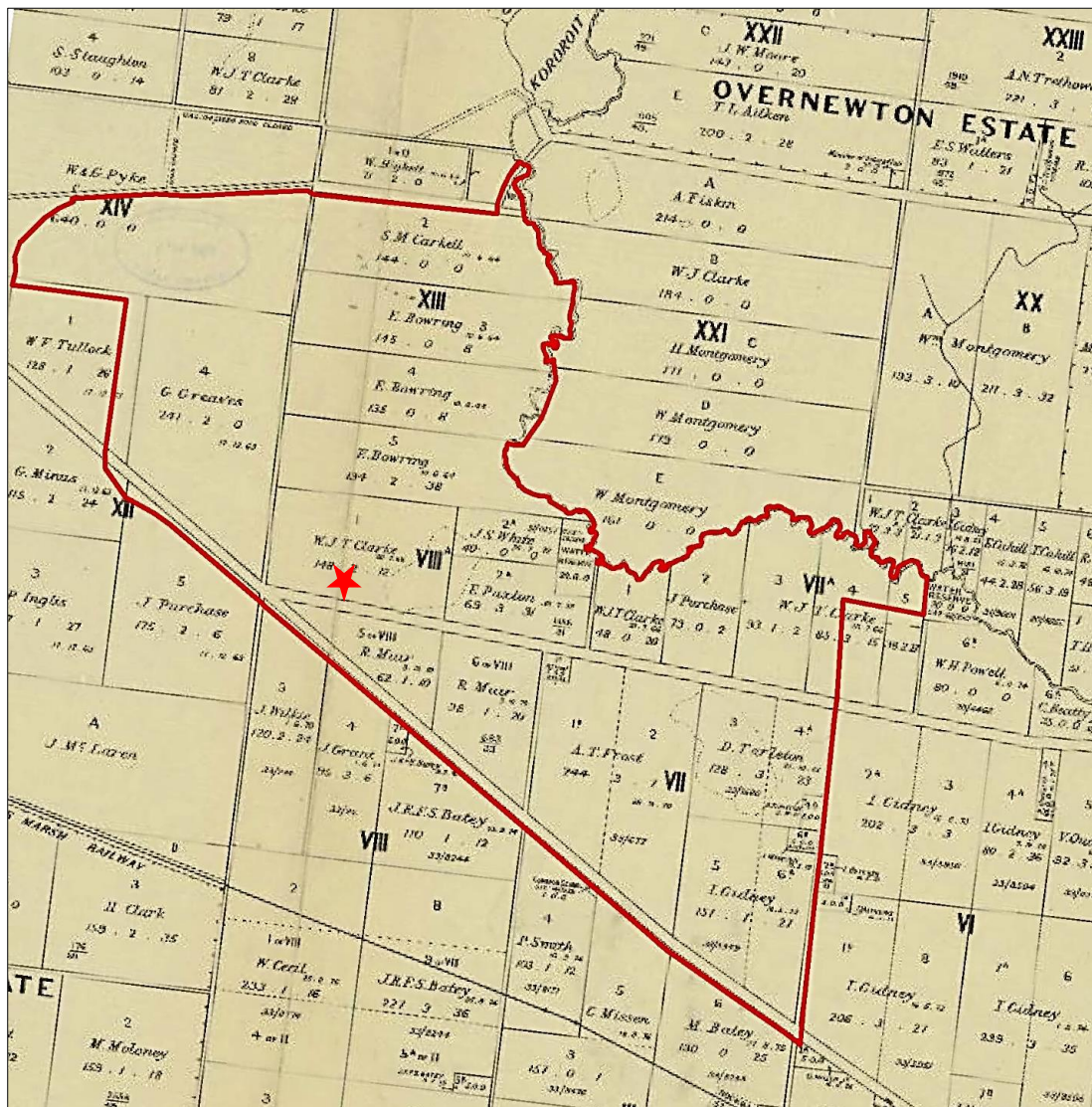


Figure 2: 1916 Kororoit parish map showing the breaking up of the larger pastoral runs into smaller allotments. The approximate location of the hut is marked by the red star (Source: SLV)

Small farming declined during the early 1860s, however, due to drought, crop and stock diseases and changing market conditions. The opening of the Rockbank railway station in 1884 (originally named Mount Atkinson) changed the local economy, as the development of the timber cutting industry was established (Moloney 2006: 38). Around the turn of the century, developments in farming science and technology saw a major farming revival in Victoria (including the Melton and Rockbank region), especially in dairying.

Table 1: Summary of ownership 1232-1290 Beattys Road (Nissen Hut) (Source: Landata 2022)

Owner/s		Year Title Transferred	Volume	Folio	Comment
William John Clarke		16.06.1877	958	191487	Of Rupertswood Sunbury, County of Bourke Esquire. Property comprised of 109 acres, three roods and 31 perches or thereabouts
Rupert Turner Havelock Clarke and Janet Marion Clarke		22.11.1897	958	191487	Baronet MLC of Rupertswood, Sunbury, Lady Clarke of "Cliveden", East Melbourne, named as Executor and Executrix of William John Clarke's will; Clarke died on 15.05.1897 and probate was granted 22.11.1897. Note added to title on 28 February 1903
	Albert Frank	17.11.1902	2731	546108	Transfer of 79 acres, 2 roods, 2 perches
	John Francis Sheahan	02.12.1902	2731	546108	149 acres, 0 roods, 8 perches
	John Peter Arandt	30.12.1902	2731	546108	149 acres, 2 roods, 12 perches
	John William Casey	13.02.1903	2731	546108	269 acres, 3 roods, 6 perches
	Thomas Missen	13.02.1903	2731	546108	241 acres, 2 roods, 0 perches
	John Richmond Smith	12.07.1909	2731	546108	'The balance'
John Peter Arandt		13.12.1902	2915	582983	148 acres, 2 roods, 12 perches CA1, Section 8
Rupert Turner Havelock Clarke		28.01.1903	2731	546115	Mortgaged
Henry Missen		04.10.1907	2731	546115	Farmer of Rockbank, from John Peter Arandt
Ellen Louisa Aitken		04.10.1907	2731	546115	From Henry Missen
Elizabeth Emily Missen and Frederick William Henry Missen		12.03.1943	2731	546115	Of Armstrong Street, Ballarat, widow of Henry Missen
Frederick William Henry Missen		08.11.1967	2731	546115	Surviving Proprietor
Neville Murray Hughes and Nevenka Marree Hughes		01.04.1985	9612	311	Derived from Vol.2915 Fol.983
Allan Donald Rodda		09.02.1999	9923	712	Lot 4 created 22.12.1989 instrument LP217378E
Amazon Property Group		16.05.2007	9923	712	1232 Beattys Road, Rockbank
Yingde Investments Pty Ltd		27.07.2020	9923	712	

Nissen Huts in the Post-War Era

Nissen huts are described as constructed from a “semi-circular, or bow-shaped girders” to make a structure that combines a roof and wall into one structure (*Daily Advertiser* 19 April 1952: 7). Stuart (2005) describes them as “semi-cylindrical prefabricated huts” and as comprising of curved steel T-shaped ribs with a corrugated iron skin. Nissen huts have been associated with military constructions, migrant hostels and community structures throughout Australia. Large numbers of Nissen huts were used in migrant hostels because they were cheap to build and easy to remove. Examples include the Preston Migrant Hostel (see Figure 3 and Figure 4), Maribyrnong (later Midway) Migrant Hostel which opened in 1950; Bonnegilla camp in Wodonga which operated between 1947 and 1971 and Villawood (later Westbridge) Migrant Hostel, Chester Hill in New South Wales. This hostel was owned by Commonwealth Hostels Ltd from 1952, and until the late 1960s Nissen huts were utilised as the rented accommodation but were later replaced with permanent structures (Dept of Finance & Administration 2006: 2).



Figure 3: View of Nissen huts in use at the Preston Migrant Hostel c.1955-1956 (Source: Museums Victoria Collections 2023)



Figure 4: View of Nissen huts in use at the Preston Migrant Hostel c.1955-1956 (Source: Museums Victoria Collections 2023)

This use of Nissen huts has been seen throughout Victoria in migrant hostels and other private residences due to both its cheapness and ease of construction. Stuart (2005) documented the ordering of pre-manufactured huts from the British Ministry of Works or second-hand units for the Australian government for the Commonwealth Post-War Immigration Scheme in 1949, where the British government offered 660 Nissen huts for £90 each, 200 larger ones for £147 each and 100 Romney Huts for £430 each (Stuart 2005:54).

The period of the mid to late 1950s had a documented surgency of recycled and modified Nissen huts being used by community groups and individuals who desired accommodation and community spaces but lacked the resources to establish permanent structures (Heritage Alliance 2008: 46). This is seen in Victoria from the various local community group uses such as Scout Halls in Strathmore (1957), Keilor East and St Albans (1959) and a sea-scout hall in Essendon (1956), displaying their use for larger community gatherings (Heritage Alliance 2008: 46). A Nissen hut served as one of the buildings for the Inverloch Fire Station (Heritage Alliance 2008: 46) from 1953 until it was replaced by a new building in 2010.

Repurposing of Nissen huts for community purposes was also a feature of life in post-war Melton. In March of 1954, the *Bacchus Marsh Express* had a story with the headline, 'Nissen Huts Worrying Melton Council'. The story reported that the Melton Shire Council was concerned that eight huts had recently been brought into the municipality but to date only one permit for the huts had been applied for. The story continued that while it was understood that these were sturdy and useful farm buildings, they were considered to be an eyesore and a number of complaints had been received when the huts appeared in residential areas in Melton and Melton South (*Bacchus Marsh Express*, 06 March 1954).

The Nissen huts made their way into local vernacular. In 1947, a decision had been made to erect a single war memorial building to house municipal offices and a public hall. That decision was recalled

but in 1954, while the question was still being debated in a council meeting, Councillor Masson was heard to interject, ‘Get a Nissen hut’ (*Bacchus Marsh Express*, 03 April 1954) to which the gathered crowd responded with raucous laughter.

From the 1960s, many Nissen huts were demolished without thought that they may be significant. Heritage Alliance (2008: 48) provided a list of 12 Nissen huts recorded by them in various desktop assessments; the present Nissen hut was not included in the list. The same report recorded Nissen huts which have since been demolished in locations including Essendon Airport and others in suburban settings including one in Carlton, one on Footscray Road in West Melbourne and two at Kilmore. Heritage Alliance came to the conclusion that, ‘based on the foregoing analysis, it can be reasonably stated that the surviving examples are now quite rare in Victoria (and, evidently, across Australia) (Heritage Alliance 2008: 49).

Heritage Status of Nissen Huts in Victoria

A search of the Victorian Heritage Database was undertaken to assess the appropriate level of significance to be assigned to the Nissen Hut at 1237-1290 Beattys Road, Grangefields. The results of the search are set out in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Heritage Status of Nissen Huts in Victoria (Source: Victorian Heritage Database 2023)

Heritage Register and Name	Description and Significance	
Victorian Heritage Register VHR H2190 Maribyrnong PS HO135 Former Maribyrnong Migrant Hostel	Former Midway and Phillip (Maribyrnong Migrant Hostel, Maidstone. The site contains a Quonset hut on Lot 2 and a Nissen Hut on Lot 1 which are remnants of the accommodation that characterised the site.	The hut is of historical, architectural and social significance to the State of Victoria.
Brooklyn Migrant Hostel (Former) No heritage protection	The huts were erected after 1951 but were all removed by 1982 with the exception of one that remained on site. The hut was located within what is now an industrial estate; however, it is not now visible in aerial photographs and satellite images and may have been demolished.	Local Historic and Aesthetic Significance to the City of Hobsons Bay, however, not on any statutory registers
Moonee Valley PS HO335 15th Essendon Sea Scouts Complex	Sea Scout Complex comprised of an adapted Nissen Hut known as the ‘Boat Deck’ and ‘Shackleton Hall’. The Nissen Hut was erected in 1954 and is the oldest surviving example in the municipality and is representative of the re-use of these huts in the post-war era.	Local historic and social significance to the City of Moonee Valley
Moonee Valley PS HO405 1st Strathmore Scout Hall (Former)	The scout hall is described as a representative and relatively intact example of Nissen huts being adapted to civilian uses following the war. The VHD states that following the demolition of a number of huts at Essendon Airport it appears to be unique in the municipality.	Historical significance to the City of Moonee Valley

Wangaratta PS HO1 Victorian War Heritage Inventory Beersheba Barracks Wangaratta	The VHD report describes 3 small Nissen-type huts and 2 lar Nissen style huts, the latter of which may be better described as a different hut type. The VHD report states that Nissen-type huts have become quite rare around Australia	Assigned a rating of L+ signifying local and possibly state significance
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The following huts were referenced in the Heritage Alliance report (Heritage Alliance 2008: 48) and are still extant; however, there is no statutory heritage protection (Table 3).

Table 3: Other Nissen Huts in Victoria

Name	Description
Hilton Street Wesleyan Methodist Uniting Church No heritage protection	A Nissen hut has been adapted for use as a church. A brick façade fronts onto Hilton Street
5th Keilor Scout Hall No heritage protection	Nissen Hut located within A.J. Davis Reserve, City of Moonee Valley

Comparative Analysis

The plates below (Plates 11 – 17) provide examples of Nissen huts that were present within the Melton region: one on Ferris Road, which was used for the storage of grain, and one on Bridge Road in Melton South, which was used for accommodation. Neither of these huts are extant (S. J. Peters, personal communication 16 June 2022).

The Nissen Hut at 1237-1290 Beattys Road shares some features with the Nissen hut shown in Plates 11 to 14, notably the arrangement of the internal timber framework and the dormer door in the side of the hut. The structure of the dormer door is consistent between the two, namely, a timber door on the right hand side and a shorter panel of corrugated iron with a light source to the left of the timber door. The Ferris Road hut has a set of louvre windows while these have been changed for a panel of fibreglass in the Beattys Road hut. Another similarity between the two are the fastenings used to secure the corrugated iron to the frame. There are no windows in the Beattys Road Nissen hut; however, in addition to the fibreglass panel in the door on its western elevation, there are also fibreglass panels in the awning over the door which would have served to let light in.

The Nissen huts on Ferris Road and Bridge Road both have end panels made of fabric other than corrugated iron – in the case of the hut on Ferris Road, timber panelling has been used while that on Bridge Road has a combination of sheeting of fibro-cement and corrugated iron. Historical images show that a range of materials were used in the construction of the huts, including timber and iron



Plate 11: Front and base view of Nissen Hut in a farm on Ferris Road utilised for grain storage (Photograph courtesy of S.J. Peters, 16.09.2011).



Plate 12: Side base view of Nissen Hut in a farm on Ferris Road utilised for grain storage (Photograph courtesy of S.J. Peters, 16.09.2011).



Plate 13: Front and base view of Nissen Hut in a farm on Ferris Road used for storage (Photograph courtesy of S.J. Peters, 16.09.2011).



Plate 14: Side view of Nissen Hut along Ferris Road Melton South (Photograph courtesy of S.J. Peters, 13.05.2011)



Plate 15: Side view of Nissen Hut along Bridge Road Melton South (Photograph courtesy of S.J. Peters, 13.05.2011)



Plate 16: Front view of Nissen Hut along Bridge Road Melton South (Photograph courtesy of S.J. Peters, 13.05.2011)



Plate 17: Front view of Nissen Hut along Bridge Road Melton South (Photograph courtesy of S.J. Peters, 13.05.2011)

These similar Nissen Huts display both the temporary nature and decomposition of materials the structures are going through; the huts have since been demolished and the hut on Beattys Road is the last known example of such a structure in the Melton area (S. J. Peters, personal communication 2022).

Applying the Heritage Overlay

The review of the history of the Nissen Hut at 1232-1290 Beattys Road, Grangefields, a comparative analysis of Nissen huts in the post-war era and within the City of Melton and an assessment of the heritage status shows that many of the remaining Nissen huts in Victoria have no heritage protection or are protected by being included in the Heritage Overlay of the relevant Planning Scheme. There are some examples of huts being included in the Victorian War Heritage Inventory (for example, those at Beersheba Barracks), but there are others that are mentioned in the records of the VHD that may no longer be extant. One such example is the Nissen huts that are listed in the VHD record (created in 1995) which describes two Nissen huts as being used as garages for the Bacchus Marsh Magistrates Court; these huts cannot be discerned in satellite images.

There are no stand-alone Nissen huts registered in the Victorian Heritage Register at a level of State significance that are there on their own merits. Huts that are registered in the Victorian Heritage Register are included through their location within the extent of places that are of State level significance, for example, the Nissen Hut in the Maribyrnong Migrant Centre.

The Nissen Hut at 1232-1290 Beattys Road, Grangefields is a tangible connection to the agricultural history of the City of Melton, being one of the Nissen huts brought into the region post-World War II

and then repurposed as sturdy farm outbuildings. The comparative analysis of the Nissen Hut at 1232 – 1290 with other Nissen huts that were brought into the Melton area shows that it retains original fabric, form and features. Where later additions have been made to the original hut structure, these have acted to demonstrate the important role that Nissen huts played in Melton in the post-war era.

It is therefore considered that inclusion in the Heritage Overlay of the Melton Planning Scheme is appropriate.

External Paint Controls

No

Internal Alteration Controls

No

Tree Controls

No

Fences & Outbuildings

No

Prohibited uses may be permitted

To be determined by the City of Melton
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Incorporated Plan

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Aboriginal Heritage Place

No

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