Place name:	Peppercorn Trees at Mount Alexander College (former Flemington National School Site)
Address:	78 Wellington Avenue (off Bignell Street), Flemington
Place typology:	Educational
Construction date range:	Circa 1872
Assessment:	heritage ALLIANCE, May 2021
Recommendation:	That the two peppercorn trees be included in the heritage overlay

Photo of place:



Two peppercorn trees within the Mount Alexander College school grounds, near Bignell Street. Photograph, Heritage Alliance, 2021.

Statement of Significance:

What is significant?

Two large peppercorn trees *Schinus Molle* exist at the rear of Mount Alexander College (near Bignell Street) on the grounds of the former Flemington National School site, circa 1872. Whilst it is not possible to determine an exact planting date, peppercorns were known to be deliberately planted at school sites to provide shade and deter flies. The age of the trees indicate they may be associated with the National School and date to circa 1872.

How is it significant?

Two large peppercorns at 78 Wellington Avenue, Flemington are of local historical significance to the City of Moonee Valley.

Why are they significant?

The two peppercorn trees *Schinus Molle* at 78 Wellington Avenue are of considerable age and growth and while their age is indeterminate, they were more than likely to have been planted in the latter half of the 19th Century, in association with the former Flemington National School. The National School later became a Common School and then State School No. 205. The original school buildings were demolished in the 1990s. The school's small rear yard where the trees were planted is on Bignell Street.

The two Peppercorns were more than likely to have been deliberately planted to deter flies and provide shade near the closet installation in the rear yard of the school, that was established after 1872. After the demolition of the old National School, they now provide the last tangible link to the earliest period of schooling in Moonee Valley. (Criterion A).

Description:

The open school yard of the Mount Alexander College contains two substantial sized Peppercorn trees both of approximately 2.5—3 metres trunk circumference and some 15 metres high. The larger tree has an approximate canopy cover of 20 metres diameter. They are located near the school's west boundary (Bignell Street) near Church Street, Flemington.

Various limbs have been removed over the years but the trees appear to be in good health and they are of reasonable height for Peppercorns. Evidence of their age can be ascertained by their substantial basal girth in comparison to their height. An assessment of the trees (T890) in 2018 for the Significant Tree Register Review found that they did not qualify for the register because of poor structure and decay in unions. The tree register does not consider the historical association of the trees.

History:

Contextual History

City of Moonee Valley occupies part of the Traditional lands of the Wurundjeri-willam clan of the Woi-wurrung people. Many sites in the area now known as City of Moonee Valley show evidence of Woi-wurrung activities and spiritual connections. Fish were trapped in the rivers and creeks, stone was quarried from the river edges, murnong daisy was collected and kangaroos hunted across grassland areas, and bark was harvested from trees in the river valleys. This relationship between the Woi-wurrung and the land, water, animals and plants, continues to this day (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.29).

The first Europeans to explore the area known as Moonee Valley was a surveyor, Charles Grimes in 1803. In 1836, settlers moving from Van Diemen's Land crossed the area in the hope of finding empty, cheap and plentiful land for sheep. By 1842, surveyors had created the first map of the Parish of Doutta Galla and then Woi-wurrung lands were offered for sale by the British Crown to Europeans (noting that the land was never ceded). The Wurundjeri were moved off their land which had a profound impact on their culture, health and language. By 1860, the entire parish was sold (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.32-33).

Early development of the area began with the goldrush period of the 1850s which saw Mount Alexander Road used as a thoroughfare to the diggings with over 30,000 people estimated as moving along the dirt road each week. Businesses and shops sprang up providing sustenance, transport and accommodation to service the passing gold rush trade. Some very early wayside hotels and shops still survive from this period (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.51-54).

After the heady days of the goldrush, the 1860s saw Essendon, Ascot Vale, Moonee Ponds and Flemington develop into permanent townships. The development of railways by private companies gave huge impetus to suburban development of the area with the opening of the Essendon railway in 1860. The government purchased the line in 1868. Suburban trains terminated at Essendon and it wasn't until 1889 that Ascot Vale, Moonee Ponds and Newmarket stations were completed. By 1893 stations opened at Strathmore and Pascoe Vale and in 1922 Glenbervie Station opened. The railways provided an enormous boost to residential development along the line and those who had previously moved to areas without trains, now clamoured for them (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.59).

By the 1880s Essendon had become a Borough and by 1891 had a population of 14,411. Many subdivisions occurred during the land boom of the 1880s and many failed to eventuate due to the depression of the 1890s. In the interwar period a boom in subdivision and residential infill occurred in Travancore, Essendon, Ascot Vale, Strathmore and Moonee Ponds, which was focused on new transport routes along the tram lines, first established to Essendon in 1905. In 1919 the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board was formed and lines were extended and improved. The tram lines saw development occur either side of Maribyrnong Road, further along Mt Alexander Road, Buckley Street and Keilor Road (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p. 65-68, p.115).

In the three decades after the Second World War, Melbourne's suburbs ballooned outward to cater for post-war migration, the baby boom, an increasing need for new housing, and a more car-centred economy. Areas to the north of Essendon had been open paddocks in 1945, but by 1950 the Shire of Keilor found themselves with a developing suburb with no name. It was later called Niddrie. Similarly, Airport West was developing quickly with houses being built before the roads. By 1964 it was claimed that Airport West had the cheapest cream brick veneers in Melbourne (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.120-121).

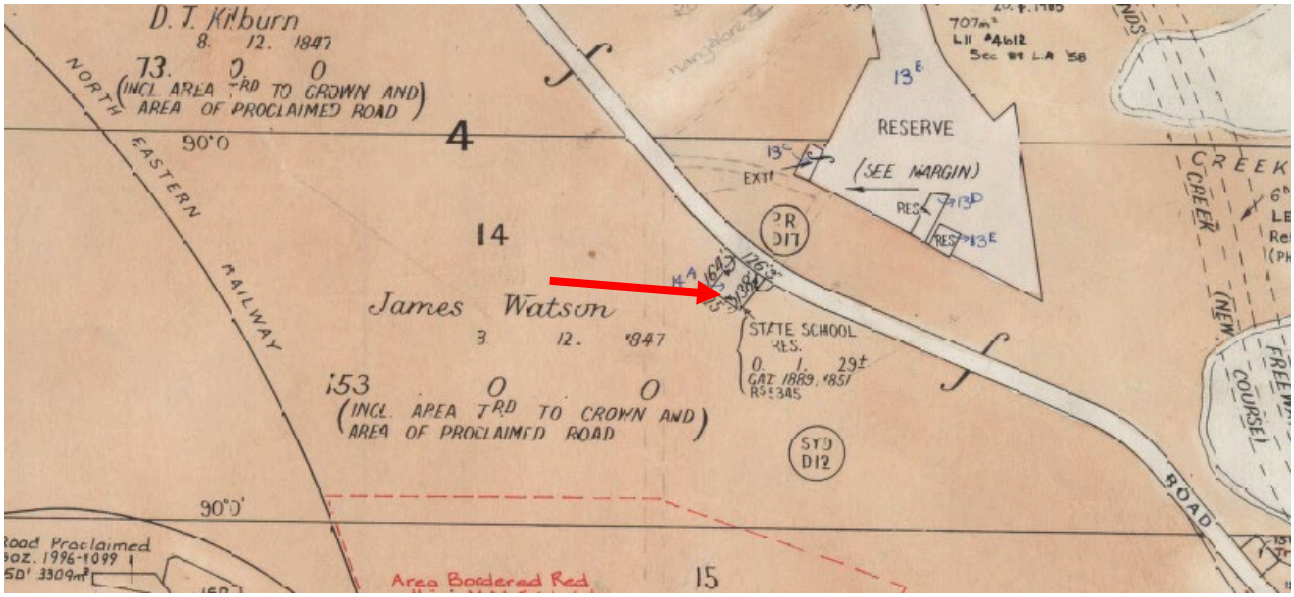
Many houses in these post-war areas were austere weatherboard or brick veneer bungalows, with a few scattered architect designed or project homes on new blocks, particularly along the Boulevard in Aberfeldie. These post-war housing areas were car-centred communities located close to industry along Keilor Road, Matthews Avenue around Essendon Airport and East Keilor. By 1960 Airport West had its first hotel, the famous Skyways Hotel and then in the 1970s the first shopping centre, owned by Westfield was begun (Heritage ALLIANCE, *Gap Heritage Study*, 2005: p. 28-30).

Post-war housing pressure also saw a huge investment by the Housing Commission of Victoria who developed 150 bungalows in concrete, weatherboard and brick in Aberfeldie. They then began an ambitious estate of houses and flats on a 77-acre site at Ascot Vale in 1949. These low-rise walk-up flats eventually gave rise to the high-rise flats of Flemington which opened in June 1965 (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.123).

Many post-war migrants bought or built houses in the outer areas of the municipality, close to employment and industry and where new, cheaper housing was readily available. These developments and public housing in Aberfeldie, Ascot Vale and Flemington have had a long-lasting effect on the nature of the Moonee Valley community which today is one of the most diverse and vibrant in Melbourne (Living Histories, *Thematic Environmental History*, 2012: p.124).

Place History

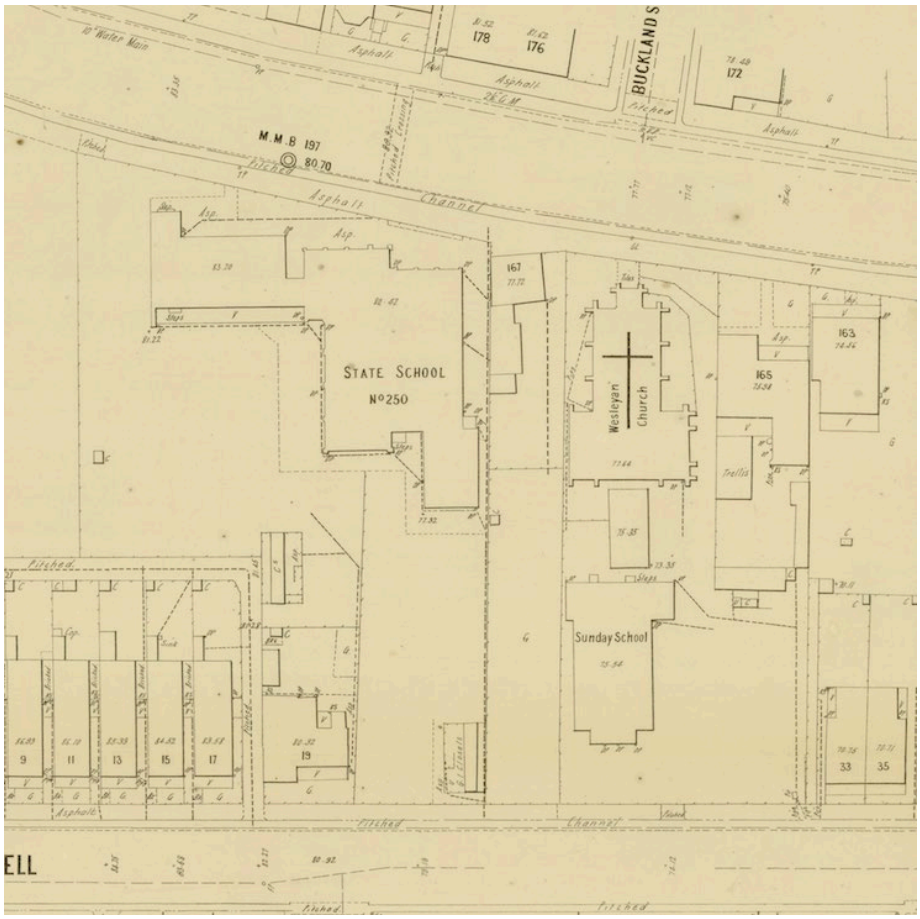
Located on the grounds of Mount Alexander College are two large peppercorns, planted at the rear of the now demolished Flemington State School building.



Excerpt from the Doutta Galla Parish Plan with arrow pointing to State School Reserve, Source, Public Records Office Victoria.

The site was set aside as a school reserve, according the Doutta Galla Parish plan, in 1851 (*Doutta Galla Parish Plan*, Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 16171, P1/2). A simple iron structure, the school operated as the Flemington National School from 1858 (Ray Kinzel, "Flemington Primary School History," accessed 30 January 2022). At this time, the school had an enrollment of 54 students, both boys and girls (Ray Kinzel, "Flemington Primary School History, accessed 30 January 2022). In 1863, the school obtained the number 250 under the *Common Schools Act* (Ray Kinzel, "Flemington Primary School; Victorian Government Gazette, no. 41, 22 April 1864: p.913). In 1867, the original 'iron pot' building was replaced by a brick building, measuring approximately 60 by 30 feet, with an iron roof.

The land behind the school along Bignell Street was purchased by the Department of Education and School Committee in 1872 for 42 pounds (Ray Kinzel, "Flemington Primary School History"). By looking at the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) plan of 1900, it appears that this portion was likely to have had a frontage to Bignell Street (MMBW Plan no. 848 & 849, 1901). The peppercorn trees are located within this portion, which was utilised as a playground. Such trees were often planted in school yards due to their ability to reduce fly numbers, a chemical effect of the peppercorn tree (Martin Steinbauer, "The Insecticidal and Repellent Activity of *Schinus Molle* L. (Anacardiaceae) Against *Drosophila Melanogaster* Meigen (Diptera: Drosophilidae) and *Tribolium Confusum* Jacquelin Due Val (Coleoptera: Tenebrionidae), 1995; Gary Presland, "On the peppertree *Schinus* L. in Australia," 2020). It is of interest that the 1901 MMBW plan shows a "closet" building on the school land between the Bignell Street boundary and the approximate location of the larger tree. By implication this would indicate that the tree provided shade over that facility. The arrangement of the school and its grounds are depicted in the MMBW map of 1901 (MMBW Plan no. 848 & 849, 1901).



Excerpt from Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Plan no. 848 & 849, 1901, State Library Victoria.

In 1885, the school was closed despite public protest due to the lack of facilities for the growing number of students. A new state school had been constructed on Bank Street, Ascot Vale to meet the district's needs. However, the Flemington school reopened that same year to relieve overcrowding at the nearby Kensington State School (Ray Kinzel, "Flemington Primary School History"). In 1925, the school was rebuilt and upgraded, reopening as the Flemington School of Domestic Arts. In 1931, it was Flemington Girls' School, in 1966, Flemington Girls' High School, and in 1973, Debney Park High School (later Debney Park Secondary College), and renamed Mount Alexander College in 2012 ("History," Mount Alexander College, accessed 30 January 2022).

The school was on the Government Historic Buildings register but in the mid 1990s a permit was issued for the demolition of the two-storey rendered brick building due to severe cracking (Personal Communication: David R. Wixted). Adjacent to the School on the south side was the gothic styled Congregational Church which was demolished approximately a decade later. The Debney Park Secondary College developed newer buildings on the site and was later renamed to Mount Alexander College which continues to occupy the land on which the trees are located.

Sources:

Primary Sources

Doutta Galla Parish Plan, Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 16171, P1/2
Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Plans, State Library of Victoria
Personal Communication: David R. Wixted
Victorian Government Gazette

Secondary Sources

Gary Presland, "On the peppertree *Schinus* L. in Australia," *The Pest Issue*: Vol. 137 (6), 2020

"History," Mount Alexander College, accessed 30 January 2022: http://www.mountalexandercollege.vic.edu.au/about-mac/history/
Martin Steinbauer, "The Insecticidal and Repellent Activity of *Schinus Molle* L. (Anacardiaceae) Against *Drosophila Melanogaster* Meigen (Diptera: Drosophilidae) and *Tribolium Confusum* Jacquelin Du Val (Coleoptera: Tenebrionidae)," *General and Applied Entomology*: Vol. 26, 1995
Ray Kinzel, "Flemington Primary School," Flemington Primary School, accessed 30 January 2022: https://www.flemingtonps.vic.edu.au/uploaded_files/media/fps_school_history.pdf

Thematic Context:

City of Moonee Valley Thematic Environmental History, 2012

8. Building community life

8.2 Educating people

Comparative Analysis:

	All photos from Google Streetview
HO343, the former Wannaeue homestead site was occupied for over a century by one of Strathmore's earliest houses, erected in the 1870s by prominent local resident John Murray Peck (1830-1903). Subsequently occupied by his widow until her death in 1928, and thence by long-time Broadmeadows Shire Secretary A T C Cook the house was demolished in 1980. The site, now occupied by a restaurant, retains remnant plantings in the form of Canary Island date palms, privet hedge and pepper trees, as well as a portion of the woven wire boundary fence along the Gaffney Street side.	
HO331, Historically, the Canary Island date palms provide evidence of the extreme popularity of palm trees - particularly this species - in Melbourne during the Inter-war period. With eleven trees in a line, it is one of the most substantial plantings of Canary Island palms in the municipality.	

Recommendation:

That the two peppercorn trees, to the extent of their canopy and tree root zone, be included in the Heritage Overlay schedule.

Schedule:

External Paint Controls	No
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	Yes (2 x *Schinus Molle* trees)

Solar Energy Controls	Yes
Fences and Outbuildings	No
Prohibited Uses	No
Aboriginal Heritage Place	No