

HO 097      Borrell's Farm ruins and site of market garden

**Location:**            **Old Calder Highway**

**Keilor**

**Map Reference:** 14 K8

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**Recommended Level of Significance:** *Local*

**Other listings:** *WRIHS*

**2000 Study Site No:** 092

**Heritage Overlay:** 097

**Reg No:** 0288

**PAHT:**            3 *Developing local, regional and national economies*

**HO status:**

**SUBTHEME:** 3.9 *Farming for export*

**AHC Criteria:** *A4, G1*



**Statement of Significance**

Borrells farm is of local social and historical significance as a remnant of the once prolific orcharding industry in Keilor, and for its associations with pioneering farmers, not the least being Jose Borrell and his family, an important local family who arrived as immigrants and introduced innovative horticultural practices, adapted from their Spanish homeland. The remaining structure is only a fragment of the former farm, but it acts as a physical symbol for the social and historical events that occurred there.

### **Description**

Remnants of an early stone and brick building, which was adapted for domestic use and formed a portion of a larger house. The timber sections and outbuildings were demolished by the MMBW in the 1980s following fires and vandalism. The vicinity of the farm retains evidence of the former terraced market garden fields and orchards, although most of the fruit trees have long been removed. Some remnants survive near the edge of the terrace - possibly second generation regrowth. The house formerly had about eleven rooms, mostly of timber, apart from the surviving bluestone section, with accretions growing with the different families occupying it, and changes such as wall removal and verandah filling. The house was damaged extensively by intentionally lit fires in the 1980s when the property had been taken over by the MMBW as part of the Metropolitan Park. The remains, apart from the stone section, were then demolished, and the timber packing shed and other outbuildings were subsequently demolished, also by the Parks division of the MMBW. The ruin is presently fenced off in cyclone fencing, and the areas of the outbuildings appear to have been top-soiled. However, there is high potential for archaeological evidence of both the buildings, and discarded artifacts. For example, a depression to the south-west may indicate a former privy or well which is almost certain to contain domestic refuse and other artifacts possibly dating back to the nineteenth century.

### **History**

#### **Architect:**

**Date** 1860s

Thomas Cahill and his wife Eliza came to live at Keilor in 1867, following their purchase of seven and a half acres near the Keilor Bridge (CA 1,2 & 4. Thomas was a fellmonger by trade but quickly established himself as a farmer in Keilor. Thomas and Eliza had eleven children, 5 or 6 born at Keilor. Thomas died in 1879 with nine children surviving him, having established a prosperous small farm. When he died, the property was valued at £997.2s-6d in his probate, with the family also having other land worth £500 which they could sell and invest the proceeds. So after his death the Cahills were able to survive on moderate but sufficient means with Eliza continuing the farm until her death in 1885. Her son, Denis, then carried on the family farm, with 29 acres near the Keilor Cemetery and another son Patrick having 13 acres to himself. In 1904 the house was of five rooms and was valued in the rate books at £20. At this stage only one person was resident, presumably Denis Cahill. Denis appears to have developed the farm as an orchard by the late 1880s, relying on the rich river soil and convenient water of the Maribyrnong River for irrigation in later years. The adjacent property to the east was held by the Goudie family who also ran a relatively-prosperous orchard. In early 1917, the rate books indicate a new owner, Jose Borrell. The Weekly Times devoted articles to the 'Spanish methods' of 'Mr Borrell of Keilor', describing in detail the improvements and the use of different manuring, irrigating, cultivation and levelling techniques, to increase the yields of vegetables. Borrell's approach was one of constant experiment and improvements. He experimented with selection and propagation of seedlings, pesticides and crop dusting, pruning tomatoes and dealing with diseases such as wilt. In the 1970s and 80s, the MMBW set about establishing large regional parks around Melbourne, of which Brimbank Park was the key park in the north west. Borrell's was purchased at this time, along with the Dodd farm (Brimbank) and Horseshoe Bend. Most of the orchard trees were removed at this stage, and the buildings became vacant. Subsequent vandalism and demolition has led to the present surviving fragment.

### **Condition/Integrity**

The ruin is in poor condition and the site has very low integrity. However, as a physical symbol of the sites significance, the remaining ruined structure is valuable.

### **Context/Comparative analysis**

Borrell's relates to the other market garden and orchard properties in the Keilor area, including Milburn's and Dodd's.

**References**

Weekly Times, 11 May 1929, 10 December 1932. Olwen Ford, 'An Interim Report on Preliminary Investigations into the Historical Significance of "Borrells", MMBW Maribyrnong Valley Park, Keilor', 1983. Olwen Ford, 'Borrell's, Keilor', report to MMBW, n.d. (1984?) Olwen Ford, 'The Story of the Borrell Market Garden, Keilor and the Borrell Family: told by Joe Borrell', compiled by Olwen Ford, n.d. (copy held by Melbourne's Living Museum of the West: 1065)

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Borrells ruin, and the landscape of the former terraced market garden fields, be included in the Heritage Overlay of the Brimbank Planning Scheme. It is also recommended that the site be included on the Heritage Inventory as a historical archaeological site.

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