

## MINTA FARM HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

### **Workers' Quarters, Minta Farm, 2-106 Soldiers Road, Berwick**



*Figure 1. Workers' Quarter, Minta Farm, 2-106 Soldiers Road, Berwick (Source: Context 2017).*

### **History**

The pastoral development of the City of Casey commenced in the late 1830s when this area formed part of the Westernport District of the Port Phillip District of New South Wales. Early pastoralists selected large areas of land that had a frontage to the Cardinia Creek. In the 1850s these were broken up into smaller farms and the area that later became 'Minta' was taken up by J. Murray and R. Dowling (Berwick parish plan).

The areas of Berwick and Beaconsfield were part of the former City of Berwick, which was initially established as a road district in 1862 and elevated to the Shire of Berwick in 1868. Settlement was scattered until the construction of the Gippsland Road in the mid-1860s and the arrival of the railway in the 1870s, which encouraged the development of the area. As well as pastoral properties, there were smaller mixed farms, dairying and fruit-growing.

Located within easy reach of Melbourne, the Berwick district provided attractive pastoral country for Melbourne's establishment. The area had links with the Melbourne Hunt Club, established in 1840, which would meet at the Berwick Inn. A number of notable settlers established properties in the Berwick area, including pastoralist and horse stud owner Richard Grice, who acquired 'Eyrecourt', Berwick, in the early 1900s and Andrew Chirnside who had 'Edrington'. In the late 1940s prominent members of Melbourne 'Society', Richard and Maie Casey, known as Lord and Lady Casey, acquired 'Edrington', Berwick. Lord Casey was appointed Governor-General of Australia in 1965, sealing Berwick's standing as a favoured district for the Establishment. M.L. Baillieu would have been connected with these families through social and business networks in Melbourne.

The property known as 'Minta', occupying 616 acres (249 hectares) on portions 31B and 32 in the Parish of Berwick, was purchased by Francis Officer in 1910. The property was bounded on the east by the Cardinia Creek, providing a reliable water supply for stock. The address for property at that time was generally given as Beaconsfield rather than Berwick. Francis Officer had married Lillian Anstey in 1908 and their daughter was born at Berwick in 1913. In addition to the 10-roomed weatherboard homestead built on the property in c.1913, there was also a 'Man's weatherboard Cottage containing 4 rooms', which may have been earlier. This building was noted in the Inventory of Assets prepared for Probate on the death of Francis Officer in 1924 (Officer, F. Allan, Gentleman, Probate Papers, 1924-25, VPRS 28/P3 unit 1520, item 200/654, PROV). Following Francis Officer's death the property was acquired by James Boag (in the name of his wife Florence Emma Boag), who was connected to the Melbourne Hunt Club and is believed to have acquired the property for the specific needs of the Hunt Club, which had recently moved from their base in Oakleigh. In the mid 1920s and through the 1930s the Melbourne Hunt Club met at the 'Minta gate' and incorporated Minta as part of the course (Tardis Enterprises 2011).

The origin of the name 'Minta' is unclear. The name was also used in the mid-1920s by the Minta Sand Company, which was a short-lived and seemingly unsuccessful enterprise that sought to extract sand from a sand-pit at the north-east corner of lot 31B, close to the Cardinia Creek (Tardis Enterprises 2011).

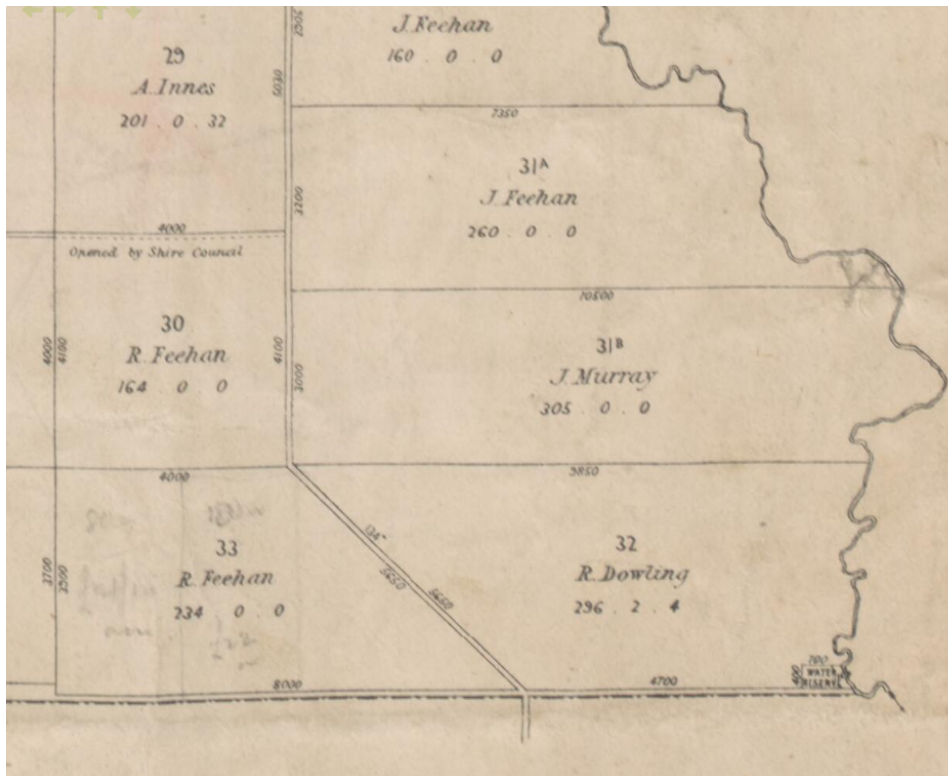


Figure 2. Extract from Parish plan of Berwick, showing lots 31B and 32 which became 'Minta'. Note the small water reserve in the extreme south-east corner of lot 32 (source: National Library of Australia).

The property was acquired by prominent Melbourne businessman Marshall Lawrence Baillieu (d.1985) in 1931, a year after his marriage to Nancy Wills-Allen. M.L. Baillieu, born in 1902, was the son of sharebroker Richard Percy Clive ('Joe') Baillieu. Members of the Baillieu family, one of Melbourne's most wealthy and well-established families, were at the centre of Melbourne Society. M.L. Baillieu's purchase of 'Minta', located in what was then Beaconsfield, was made at the peak of the Depression when farm properties could be obtained at undervalued prices. In the late 1930s, and into the 1940s and 1950s, Marshall and Nancy Baillieu and their children continued to reside in Toorak and South Yarra. They would have

employed a resident farm manager at Minta, and presumably also would have employed seasonal labour.

Both the Myer House and the workers' quarters at 'Minta' date to the late 1940s. No shortage of private wealth enabled M.L. Baillieu to make necessary improvements to the property in the years of unprecedented growth and prosperity after World War II. Australian producers across a number of primary industries were doing well in overseas markets; there was full employment and local manufacturing was booming. In the 1960s, M.L. Baillieu, whose business address was the prestigious Collins House, was a director of one of Australia's most successful companies, the Broken Hill Proprietary Company Ltd (based in Melbourne), which prospered greatly during the long boom (1946-1973). Primarily a Melbourne businessman, Baillieu aptly fitted the type of the 'Collins Street farmer'. Minta was his alternative residence and his retreat from the city, but here he also worked hard to improve the property and to develop the stock quality. He registered the 'Minta' flock, a British breed of sheep, in 1954. He also bred race horses at Minta (*Pastoral Review* 1970). The Baillieu family also improved the property with tree-planting. The family planted a number of English Oaks that were brought from England, and several Pin Oak trees that were planted as seed from America (J. Baillieu, 2010. personal communication, 9 June 2010, cited in Tardis Enterprises 2011).

M.L. Baillieu's aunt Marjorie Merlyn Baillieu had married the prominent Melbourne retailer and philanthropist Sir Sidney Myer, who was the founder and owner of the Myer Emporium. It was the Baillieu family's links to Sidney Myer that presumably led to the erection of a 'Myer House', a single-storey timber residence, at Minta Farm in c.1947 (GJM 2017). The timber workers' quarters, which appear to date to the same period (c.1946-48), were most likely erected around the same time as the Myer House as the choice of design was in sympathy with the Myer House design. The workers' quarters do not appear in an aerial photograph dated 1945, indicating that it had not been erected by that time (see Figure 2). Other family members had also moved to the Berwick district. Of note is the fact that a relative, John Baillieu, had acquired the property 'Eynesbury' (VHR H0362) in Melton in 1947, where he erected three Myer Houses.

The timber workers' quarters erected c.1947-48 was probably designed to replace, and significantly improve, the earlier workers quarters at Minta, which were extant in 1924 and presumably survived until at least the late 1940s. In addition to the general period of prosperity in the late 1940s, this may have been a time that Marshall Baillieu took on a larger and more permanent workforce at Minta. It seems likely that this was a period that he expanded farming operations and the need for permanent labour at Minta.

Single men's quarters on pastoral properties had traditionally been, up to the late nineteenth century, fairly primitive habitations – simple, rudimentary buildings with little by way of comforts, and sometimes without flooring, plumbing or toilet facilities. Some early examples were simply an open plan room with a fireplace for cooking and heating. The extent of comforts depended on the values and priorities of the property owner, and also to some extent on changing standards of hygiene. The workers' quarters at Minta are certainly a more refined example of what was, traditionally, a more basic building form. Internally, the layout of the quarters at Minta provided bedrooms with lined internal walls and fitted en suite bathrooms, which added a more sophisticated level of comfort than was typically found in farm workers' quarters. The inclusion of the enclosed verandah, or breeze-way, and the steel-framed windows are refinements that suggest an architect was involved in the design. For a family with the social standing of the Baillieu family, the employment of an architect in the construction of new buildings would have been standard practice.



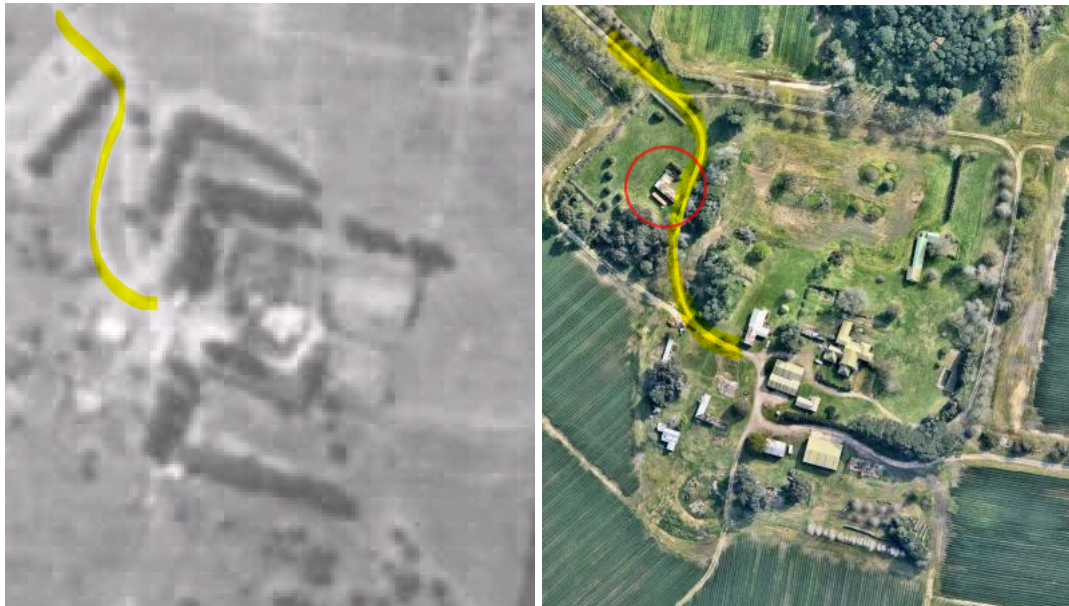


Figure 3. Aerial photo of 'Minta', Berwick, taken in 1945 (left) compared with a more recent aerial image (right), showing that the workers' quarters were not extant in 1945 (Source: Nearmap & RAAF 1939, 'Aerial Survey of Victoria: Cranbourne B3'.)

Whilst Melbourne grew considerably through the 1950s and 1960s, the area that is now the City of Casey continued to be an important agricultural and pastoral district. Minta continued to operate as a working property into the 1970s and 1980s. On the death of Marshall Lawrence Baillieu in 1985, the property passed to his son Ian Marshall Baillieu, who continued to farm the property.

## Description and analysis

### **Accommodation for seasonal and permanent workers**

Barracks-style accommodation for farm workers are found on most large farming properties across Australia, dating from the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. They are built by the farm owners and are usually located away from the main homestead, near other outbuildings built for equipment storage, shearing and packing sheds.

The configuration and design will vary depending on the type of workers housed, and in particular the duration of occupancy. Shearers' quarters are usually occupied for the shortest periods and are usually the most basic. Seasonal workers often move across Australia. For example, fruit pickers on the Goulburn Valley often work in northern NSW and Queensland as cane cutters. The quarters for fruit pickers and cane cutters are not usually much more elaborate than those for shearers. The main difference is that shearers usually have a cook, whereas other seasonal workers prepare food in communal kitchens adjoining dining areas. Recreation rooms are often provided, and wash houses and clothes lines.

Vegetable growing and pastoral activities necessitate longer periods of occupation by farm workers, who were often permanent. Then accommodation for families was also required. Today many farm workers do not normally live on site, and drive to farms from nearby towns or cities.

The design of such rural accommodation has a number of common features. Individual quarters are usually joined by a verandah, and this is often linked to the kitchen and dining rooms. The design and materials are often similar to nearby sheds. Vernacular forms are common.

The Minta Farm workers' quarters is a good late example of the typology, albeit with a more considered architectural design. It has an unusually high standard of amenity with en-suite bathrooms. It appears to have been designed for permanent occupation.

**Description**

The Minta Farm workers' housing appears to have been built in the immediate postwar era, at a similar time that the Myer House was erected on the property.

It is an L- shaped building. It has two gabled roofs which extend in a continuous plane over the verandah. The verandah is semi-enclosed with a solid base with fly-screened openings at waist height.

The verandah serves as the principal circulation passage to individual bedrooms in the east-west bedroom wing and the north-south kitchen and dining room wing. There are three self-contained bedrooms with bathrooms.

It has a corrugated iron roof, and is clad with bullnose weatherboards. The steel-framed casement windows are similar to those used at Caringal Flats, Toorak, in 1948. On the south elevation of the bedroom wing are three highlight bathroom windows.

The timber louvres on the gable ends reflects residential design for middle-class housing of the era. This gives the building a sense of style that is compatible with the design of the Myer House, and provides an unusual architectural refinement for a farm building. The use of fly screen for large enclosures was common in well-designed housing in earlier periods and employed by architects in the postwar period.

The building has well considered design and may be the work of an architect. The use of a considered architectural expression for residential farm buildings was more common in the nineteenth century when the idea of a picturesque feudal farm village was found at such locations at Warrock homestead in the Western District of Victoria. The house is basically intact externally, but is in a neglected state.



Figure 4. North-east view (Source: Context 2017).



Figure 5. Detail of verandah showing fly screen enclosure (Source: Context 2017).



Figure 6. East view of bedroom wing, showing gable end of dining - kitchen wing (Source: Context 2017)



Figure 7. East view of bedroom wing (Source: Context 2017)



Figure 8. View of verandah leading to bedrooms (Source: Context 2017)



Figure 9. Detail of steel casement window (Source: Context 2017)

### Comparative analysis

Within the City of Casey, there are few surviving examples of farm workers' accommodation, or workers' quarters, that is of a comparable type and style to that at Minta. Some examples of workers' accommodation survive on farming properties in the municipality, but these examples tend to be either small detached houses or cottages rather than 'quarters' (invariably built as shearers' quarters) for single men; examples are at 'Tulliallan', Cranbourne North, c.1860s (City of Casey, HO152), and 'Roads End', Berwick (City of Casey, HO1). In almost all cases the surviving examples of workers' accommodation in Casey are nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century structures rather than postwar examples. At 'Piney Ridge', Endeavour Hills (City of Casey, HO42), however, there is an extant post-1942 farm manager's brick cottage.



Most of the shearers' quarters that were erected on the large pastoral properties in the City of Casey date to the late nineteenth or early-twentieth century when the properties were established or consolidated. Whilst there was a period of prosperity for Victorian wool-growers in the postwar period, most property owners would have used or retained the pre-existing workers' accommodation on their properties rather than to rebuild. The example at Minta is rare because it represents a relatively significant outlay in the 1940s and was a more refined type of workers' accommodation than was typical in the area.

Outside of the City of Casey, comparable examples of workers' (specifically shearers') accommodation exist elsewhere in country Victoria, particularly on large well-appointed properties in prime sheep-farming country, such as the Western District and the Mansfield district. Comparable workers' quarters are more common where properties were large and prosperous. Examples in western Victoria include those at 'Cherrymount', Glenthompson (c.1920s-40s) and 'Correa', Dunkeld (c.1920s).

## Statement of Significance

### *What is significant?*

The workers' quarters at Minta Farm, Berwick, are significant. The single-storey, L-shaped timber quarters were built in c.1947-48 by owner Marshall Lawrence Baillieu, grazier and businessman, probably as permanent accommodation for farm workers at Minta Farm.

### *How is it significant?*

The workers' quarters at Minta, Berwick, are of local architectural and historical significance to the City of Casey.

### *Why is it significant?*

Architecturally, the workers' quarters building at Minta Farm, which date to c.1947-48, are a highly intact and relatively sophisticated example of farm workers' accommodation, which is a rare building type in the City of Casey. Although once a common building type on the large grazing properties in the district, there are now few known examples of workers' quarters remaining in the City of Casey. There are no other known comparable examples of workers' quarters built in the postwar period that survive in the municipality. **(Criterion B)**

Historically, the workers' quarters at Minta Farm, Berwick, is evidence of the prosperous period of the wool industry in Victoria in the postwar era, when farm workers were in demand, and the general prosperity of graziers in the district during that period.

Historically, the workers' quarters at Minta Farm, Berwick, is associated with the various successful enterprises, including grazing, pursued by members of the Baillieu family, who were one of the wealthiest and most prominent families in Victoria. **(Criterion H)**

## Planning Control Recommendations

Recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay of the Casey Planning Scheme as an individually Significant place.

Recommendations for the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) in the Casey Planning Scheme:

<b>External Paint Colours</b> Is a permit required to paint an already painted surface?	No
<b>Internal Alteration Controls</b> Is a permit required for internal alterations?	No
<b>Tree Controls</b>	No

Is a permit required to remove a tree?	
<b>Victorian Heritage Register</b> Is the place included on the Victorian Heritage Register?	No
<b>Incorporated Plan</b> Does an Incorporated Plan apply to the site?	No
<b>Outbuildings and fences exemptions</b> Are there outbuildings and fences which are not exempt from notice and review?	No
<b>Prohibited uses may be permitted</b> Can a permit be granted to use the place for a use which would otherwise be prohibited?	Yes
<b>Aboriginal Heritage Place</b> Is the place an Aboriginal heritage place which is subject to the requirements of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006?	No

### Recommended HO curtilage



*Recommended curtilage for the Workers Quarters at Minta Farm shown in purple line. Distance from the structure to the proposed curtilage shown in text boxes.*



## References

Ancestry.com

Berwick-Pakenham Historical Society 1982. *In the Wake of the Pack Tracks*. Berwick-Pakenham Historical Society, Pakenham.

Casey-Cardinia – Links to our past: <http://caseycardinalinkstoourpast.blogspot.com.au>

Cherrymount: <http://www.visitgreaterhamilton.com.au/cherrymount-retreat>

Context Pty Ltd 2004, 'Thematic Environmental History (post-contact history)', prepared for the City of Casey, December 2004.

Correa Quarters: <http://coreaquarters.com.au>

Encyclopedia of Melbourne: <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/>

GJM Heritage 2017. 'Heritage Advice, "Myer House", Minta Farm, Berwick (Stage 3)', prepared for the Victoria Planning Authority, 11 July 2017.

Officer, F. Allan, Gentleman, Probate and Administration files, 1924-25, VPRS 28/P3 unit 1520, item 200/654, PROV.

Parish plan, Parish of Berwick (National Library of Australia).

Tardis Enterprises Pty Ltd 2011. 'Minta Farm GAA PSP11, Historical Cultural Heritage Assessment', prepared for the Growth Areas Authority, 28 February 2011.

Victorian Heritage Database: <http://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/>

Victorian Places website: <http://www.victorianplaces.com.au/>