



History of the Old Weatherboard Cottage at 1070 Mount Alexander Road, Essendon



Photo of cottage at 1070 Mount Alexander Road, Essendon (Bob Chalmers)

The small four roomed weather-board cottage known as 1070 Mount Alexander Road, North Essendon (and originally known as No 902), was described in Graeme Butler's "Essendon Conservation Study" (January 1985). Whilst, Butler had difficulty in establishing the exact age of the residence, he suggested that it could have been built as early as 1854 by/for Joshua Ewart Cooper, who purchased the part of Arthur Purdon's two and three quarter acre Crown Grant (Crown Allotment 36 of the Township of Essendon & Hawstead) on 23rd January 1854. Cooper's brother, Thomas Smith Cooper, a coach builder, owned land adjoining his in Marco Polo Street and remained in the area until his death in 1920.

Joshua Ewart Cooper, who died in Malmsbury in 1893, had mortgaged his land in Essendon to Charles Payne for £500, and unable to repay the mortgage, forfeited his property. Payne sold it to carpenter, David Abbey in September 1858. Land records do not indicate whether or not there

was a dwelling on the land at this time, but the fact that Cooper had taken out a mortgage with Payne for £500 in 1854, shortly after paying just £126 for the half acre of land, suggests that he was building a residence on his block. Abbey paid Payne £227/5/- for the land.

David Abbey is listed in the first Sands & Macdougalls directory of 1865 as a carpenter, living in Mount Alexander Road, Essendon, and remained there until 1867. In October 1867 he sold his property to ironmonger, George Robertson, who served as a Councillor of the Essendon Ward of the Essendon & Flemington Borough from 1871 to 1878.

From the above, it can be ascertained that the humble little cottage was possibly built in 1854, or in 1859 by David Abbey, after purchasing the land from Payne. This means that it has stood on this site for in the vicinity of 156 years as an example of the simple dwellings of early Essendon, and is certainly one of the oldest (an perhaps the oldest) existing dwelling in this part of the district. In his summary on page 127 of "The Essendon Conservation Study," Butler notes:

‘Architecturally, an altered simple cottage of indefinite age with some valuable remnant details; of regional interest and high local importance, as atypical to and predating, much of Essendon’s built environment.’

He further states:

‘Historically, of potential regional importance as a gold era timber cottage and residence of the type of service tradesmen which flourished on the Mount road during that time: of high local importance.’

I assisted David Helms, who is employed by the City of Moonee Valley, researching sites for the Moonee Valley Heritage Study early in 2015, and our research, independent to that of Butler, brought us to the same conclusions.

The residence became the property of Maria Robertson following her husband’s death and she secured the first title to the property (Shown on Application 14400) and dated 22 July 1881. On 13 April 1888 it was sold to Angelina DeZille, the eldest daughter of Leon DeZille and Margaret Loorim. It remained in the DeZille family until April 1922. Angelina Best, who had married Charles Best in 1891, died on 14 May 1920. In the Inventory of her Will (dated June 1920), the land in Mount Alexander Road “upon which is erected an old four room W.B cottage about sixty years old” This, if an accurate estimate, would suggest that the cottage was built by carpenter, David Abbey in c1859/60.

Report compiled by Bob Chalmers for the Essendon Historical Society, 2015.