HO82 – Rothwell Reserve, 230 Rothwell Road, Little River

Heritage Place: Rothwell Reserve	**HO Reference:** HO82 **Date updated:** 15 October 2026

Address: 230 Rothwell Road, Little River



Figure 1: Rothwell Reserve, 230 Rothwell Road, Little River. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. 2025.

Item Group: Parks, Gardens and Trees **Item Type:** Reserve	**Key Theme:** Sports and Recreation; Building Towns and Cities **Key Sub-theme:** Reserves and Sports Grounds; Planting Trees and Cultivating Gardens
Designer: N/A **Builder:** N/A	**Construction:** c. 1890 **Style:** N/A

Significance Level: Local

Recommendation: Retain tree controls. Retain solar energy controls. Update place name. Update place address

Controls:	○	External paint controls	○	Internal alteration controls	●	Tree controls (sugar gum trees (*Eucalyptus cladocalyx*))
	○	Included on Victorian Heritage Register	○	Incorporated Plans	○	Outbuildings and fence not exempt
	○	Prohibited uses may be permitted	○	Aboriginal Heritage Place	●	Solar energy system controls

Curtilage

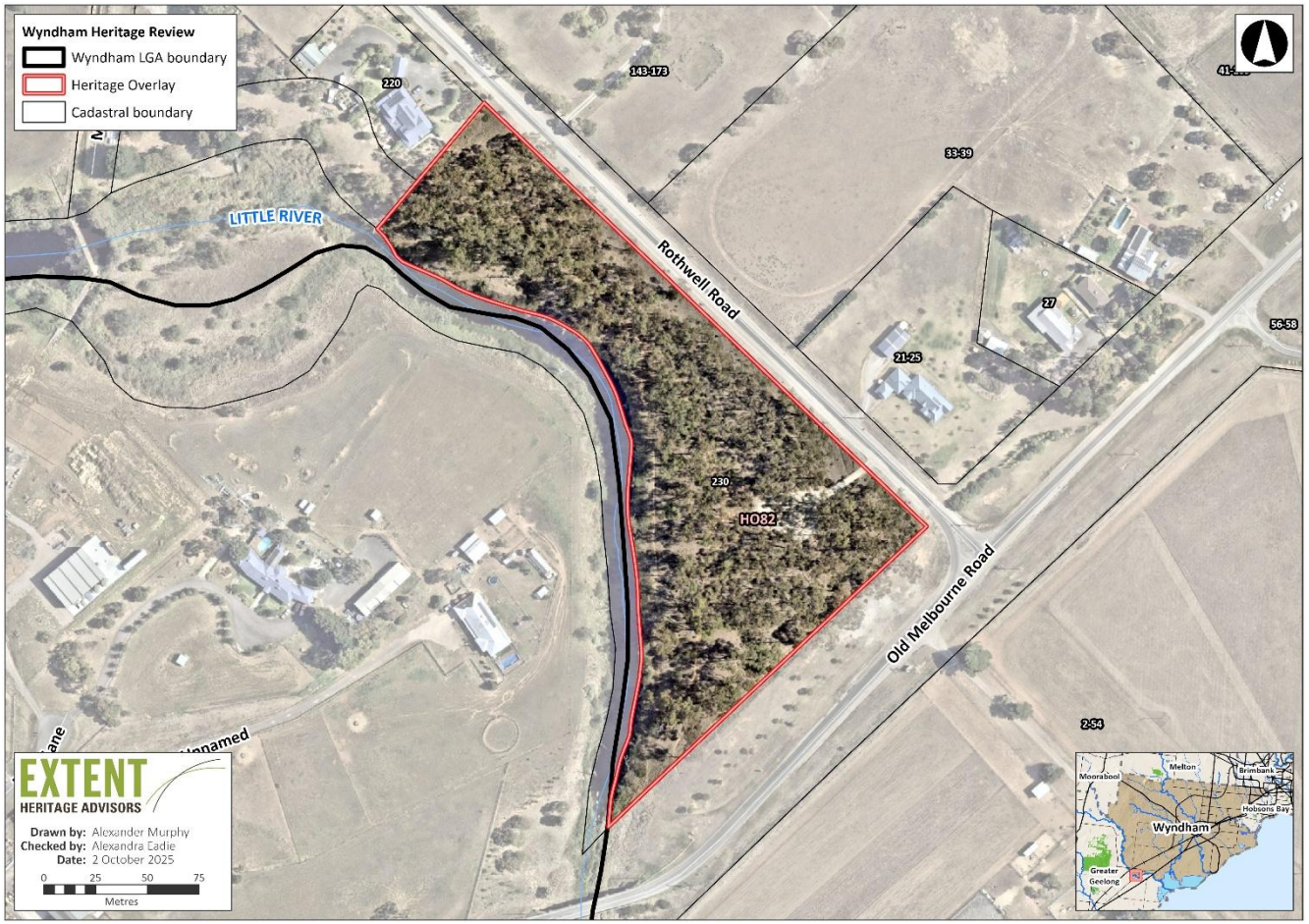


Figure 2: Rothwell Reserve, 230 Rothwell Road, Little River. *Aerial Basemap source*: Nearmap. 2025. *Spatial data source*: VicMap & Department of Transport and Planning.

HERCON Criteria Assessment

A	*Importance to the course, or pattern of our cultural or natural history*	Rothwell Reserve is of historical significance as a designated public park provided for in the early establishment of the township of Little River. The reserve also demonstrates the tree planting program that was initiated to manage replanting and assist in the management of the land following flooding.
B	*Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history*	The place does not meet this criterion.
C	*Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history*	The place does not meet this criterion.
D	*Important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments*	The place does not meet this criterion.
E	*Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics*	Rothwell Reserve with its plantings of sugar gum trees and setting alongside Little River is of aesthetic significance as a place of natural attraction. The composition of trees, including the scale of the plantings across the entirety of the reserve, establishes a forest-like setting with the picturesque backdrop to Little River. The sugar gums exhibit evidence of pollarding which demonstrates the ongoing management of the landscape following the initial planting of trees to enhance the tree canopies and support the overall forest-like natural aesthetic of the reserve.
F	*Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period*	The place does not meet this criterion.
G	*Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of the continuing and developing cultural traditions*	The place does not meet this criterion.

H	*Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.*	The place does not meet this criterion.

Statement of Significance – Rothwell Reserve, 230 Rothwell Road, Little River

Address: 230 Rothwell Road, Little River	**PS ref no:** HO82



Figure 3: Rothwell Reserve, 230 Rothwell Road, Little River. *Source:* Extent Heritage Pty Ltd. 2025.

What is significant?

Rothwell Reserve, including the open character of the reserve, and the sugar gum trees (*Eucalyptus cladocalyx*) within the reserve, is significant. The later roadway, contemporary facilities, including bins, seating and fencing, are not significant.

How is it significant?

Rothwell Reserve is of historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Wyndham.

Why is it significant?

Rothwell Reserve is of historical significance as a designated public park provided for in the early establishment of the township of Little River. The reserve also demonstrates the tree planting program that was initiated to manage replanting and assist in the management of the land following flooding. (Criterion A)

Rothwell Reserve with its plantings of sugar gum trees and setting alongside Little River is of aesthetic significance as a place of natural attraction. The composition of trees, including the scale of the plantings across the entirety of the reserve, establishes a forest-like setting with the picturesque backdrop to Little River. The sugar gums exhibit evidence of pollarding which demonstrates the ongoing management of the landscape following the initial planting

of trees to enhance the tree canopies and support the overall forest-like natural aesthetic of the reserve. (Criterion E)

Primary Source

Rothwell Reserve citation, Extent Heritage, 2026.

Description

Physical Analysis

Rothwell Reserve is located on the eastern bank of Little River (Figure 11), with Rothwell Road forming the eastern boundary of the reserve and Old Melbourne Road to the south (Figure 9). The northern boundary of the reserve blends into residential properties.

The park is predominantly flat with the western extent of the park descending to the river edge. Centrally within the park is a vehicular access road with an informal parking space accessed via a dirt road from Rothwell Road (Figure 10). The parking space is enclosed by low-rise treated pine fencing. The remainder of the park has a plantation of sugar gums (*Eucalyptus cladocalyx*), nearly all of which have undergone pollarding. The reserve includes some unmarked informal pathways with a trail along the river (Figure 12). The reserve is separated from the road by a low rise treated pine fence.

The reserve includes some infrastructure including rubbish bins and timber seating.

Alterations and Additions

- Pollarding of trees
- Introduction of low rise treated pine fencing*
- Introduction of seating and rubbish bins*
- Introduction of road within reserve*
- Introduction of informal parking space*

Rothwell Reserve is in good condition and is of high integrity.

**** Denotes element that does not contribute to the cultural significance of the place.***

History

Rothwell Reserve is located on the traditional and unceded lands of the Wadawurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation, the Traditional Custodians of Country. Wadawurrung people are deeply connected to Dja (Country), including the lands, waters and skies, and to Yaluk (waterways), Murran (nature), Weeagoon (living things) and Wiyn (fire). Wadawurrung Country encompasses vast volcanic plains and mountains, Little River (Worrin-yaloke) to the west and the mighty Werribee River (Wirribi Yaluk) in the east, and abundant coastlines and wetlands, all of which hold the stories and memories of Wadawurrung ancestors.

Despite the impacts of colonisation, including dispossession of land and disruption to cultural practices, Wadawurrung people have maintained and continue to sustain their deep connection to Country, Land, Waters and Culture. The memories embedded in Country remain alive today, including intangible cultural heritage and song lines, reflecting the continuity of cultural knowledge, custodianship and resilience passed down through generations.

The Rothwell Reserve is located within a culturally significant landscape for the Wadawurrung peoples, encompassing the You Yangs (Wurdi Youang) and Little River (Worrin-yaloke). The You Yangs are a sacred area associated with the great creator spirit Bundjil and comprise a landscape of high cultural significance, containing numerous stone arrangements, quarries and rock wells. Granite sourced from this landform was a valued material and played an important role in trade across the surrounding basalt plains, while the retention of the Eastern Kulin place name reflects the enduring cultural identity of the landscape. Little River is a significant waterway that provided essential travel routes, access to food and freshwater, and other key resources, supporting cultural, social and economic activities. Together, these interconnected features form part of a broader cultural landscape that continues to hold deep significance within Wadawurrung Country.

Upon the arrival of colonists into Port Phillip Bay from the 1850s, land north and west of the colonial settlement of Melbourne was quickly usurped. Reports from early explorers highlighted the basalt plains as open, grassy and lightly vegetated, ideal conditions for overlanding stock (Vines 1993, 9; Broome 1984, 23). The Wyndham region was soon dominated by squatter pastoralists (James and Pritchard 2008, 4; Ecology and Partners 2015, 8). Centred around the Little River region were notable pastoralists George and Monckton Synnot, Grass and North, then later the Chirnside family.

Many of the early settlers to Little River were of Scottish origin, a close-knit community that persisted into the twentieth century (Werribee Shire Banner 1922, 2). The introduction of the Farmers' Common in the 1860s protected smaller landholders from being displaced by large pastoral estates (The Age 1861, 5). Civic institutions, public amenities and various private businesses were gradually established, further strengthening the town's community and economic standing (Shaw 2009).

Place History

As the nearby township of Rothwell developed in the early 1850s, the area later attributed to Rothwell Reserve remained under pastoral license (Figure 4).

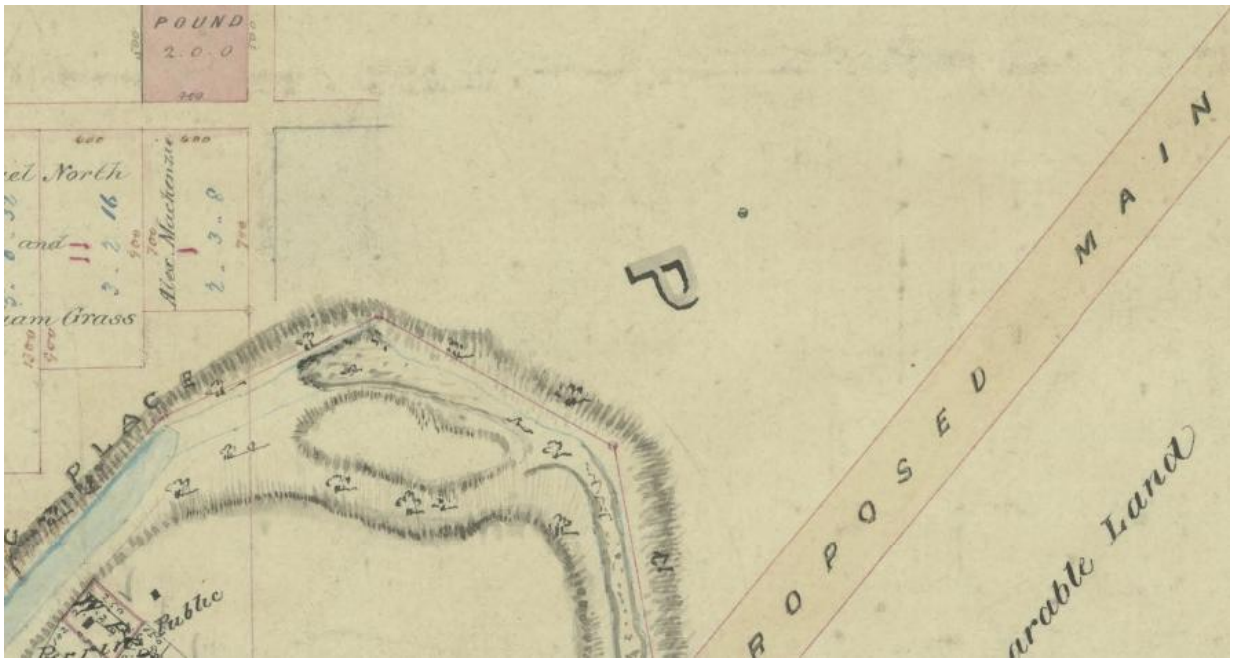


Figure 4. The area later attributed to Rothwell Reserve in 1855. *Source:* J. H. Taylor. 1855. 'Plan of the Township and Suburbs of Rothwell on the Little River.' Map. Public Records Office Victoria. https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/DF828960-F840-11E9-AE98-8DC87D86EE74?image=1

The Farmers' Common

The introduction of the Land Act of 1860 included a clause on 'Commonage.' As gazetted in March 1861, any Crown land (within 5 miles of a nominated area) not yet appropriated would be incorporated into the Farmers' Common (The Age 1861, 5). In Little River, the significant amount of land taken up by squatter pastoralists and the minimal land yet appropriated meant that approximately 20,000 acres were designated as Farmers' Commons around the township (Figure 5):

> 'At Little River, County of Grant, Parishes of Bulban and Wurdi Youang. – Extent, about 20,000 acres: Being the un-appropriated Crown lands within the parishes of Bulban and Wurdi Youang.' (Vic. Gov Gazette, 8 March 1861, 513).

This new legislation greatly increased the tension between squatter pastoralists who held licenses for vast tracts of land, and the farmers conducting dairying and cropping. Although squatters who held a license for the affected area could claim a refund for their license fee, the reclaiming of this land left John Grant, a pastoralist located around the You Yangs area, financially ruined by the new legislation (The Age 1861, 5; The Geelong Advertiser 1860, 2). Through what was described as a "system of intimidation," pastoralists would repeatedly torment the farmers attempting to use the Farmers' Commons by impounding farmers' stock (Geelong Advertiser 1862, 3; The Age 1861, 5; Geelong Advertiser 1861, 3).

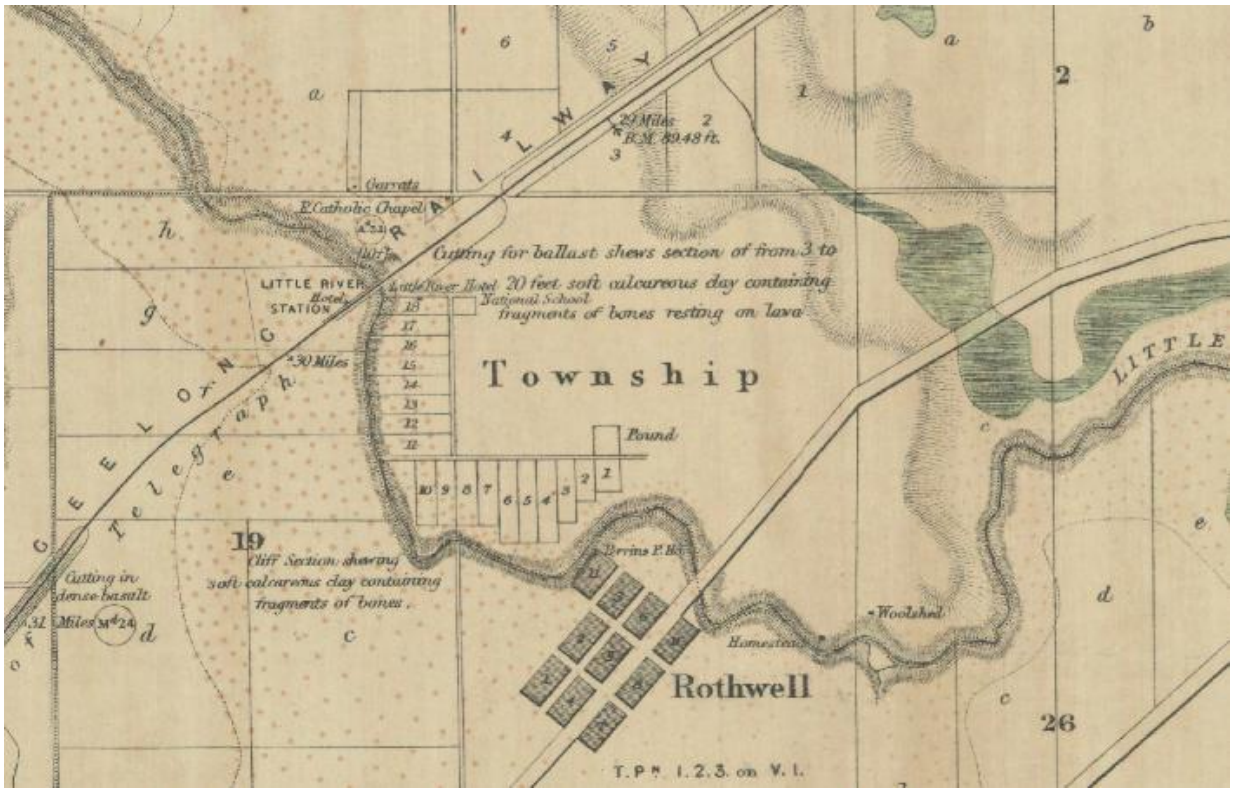


Figure 5. The extent of purchased lands as of 1862. *Source:* Geological Survey Office Melbourne. 1863. 'Geological Survey of Victoria.' Map. Public Records Office Victoria. https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/7F79169D-F843-11E9-AE98-53A89A0C5529

Public Park

In August of 1890, eight acres of land fronting Little River was designated as a Public Park, stretching between the river, the Police Reserve, Rothwell Road and the Melbourne-Geelong Road (Victorian Government Gazette 1890, p.3733). From this time, the reserve was known as Rothwell Reserve.

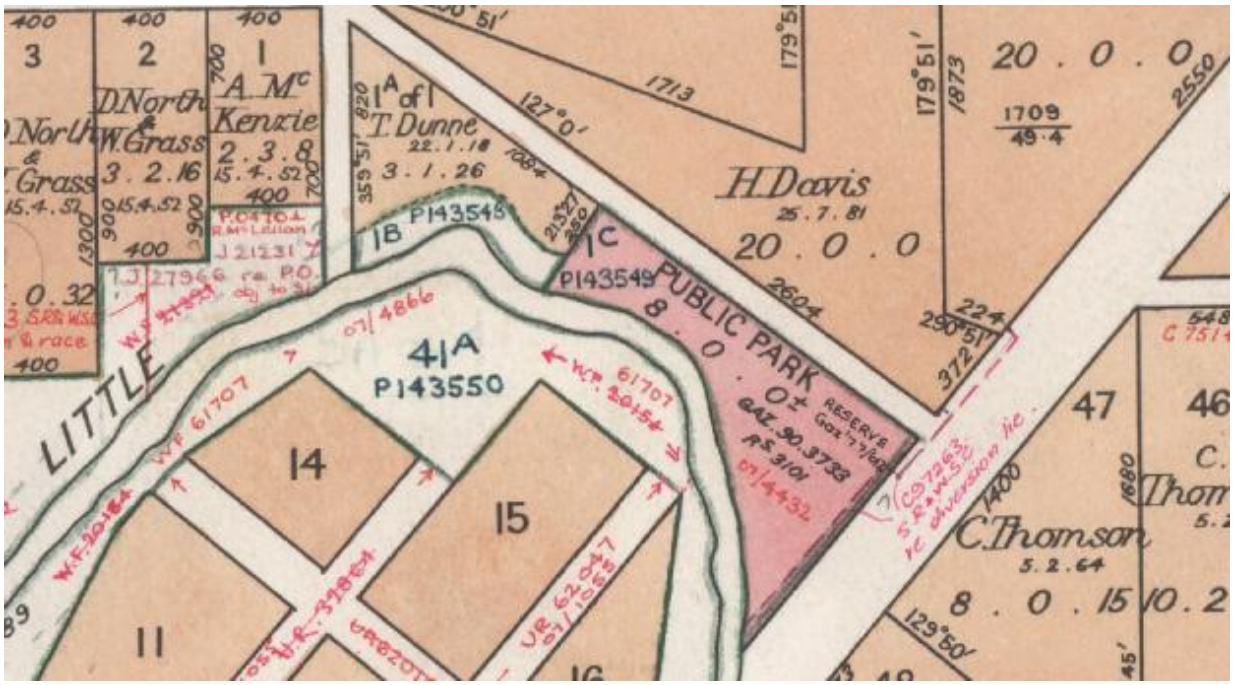


Figure 6. Rothwell Reserve shown as 'Public Park,' abutting private land formerly attributed to the police reserve. *Source:* W. M. Houston. 1968. 'Township of Little River.' Department of Lands and Survey. Map. Public Records Office Victoria. https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/08DE6D25-F410-11EA-BE8C-0D2F50D39C0E 1968

In 1896, extensive drainage works were proposed by the Shire Council, to combat flood-related erosion that was occurring at Rothwell Reserve. The proposed works were extensive, involving installation of a series of 9 inch earthen pipes to divert water underground rather than allowing it to over the river banks (The Bacchus Marsh Express 1896, 1). These works were carried out by T. Ryan by September of that year (The Bacchus Marsh Express 1896, 3).

There are a few remnant pine trees (*Pinus)* within Rothwell Reserve, which have historically been planted to act as wind breaks. The sugar gums (*Eucalyptus cladocalyx*) that fill the reserve, as well as the pines, have been present since at least 1931 (Figure 7). It is understood that the sugar gums were planted in 1896 when Council planted approximately 100 trees within Rothwell Reserve, to replace those washed away in the recent flood (The Bacchus Marsh Express 1896, 1). As is the case across the municipality, many of the sugar gum trees within Rothwell Reserve have been pollarded over their lifetimes, a process of lopping to encourage vertical regrowth to produce useable timber.

Aside from clearing and laying of a parking area in the mid to late twentieth century, there has been little change at Rothwell Reserve for over a century.

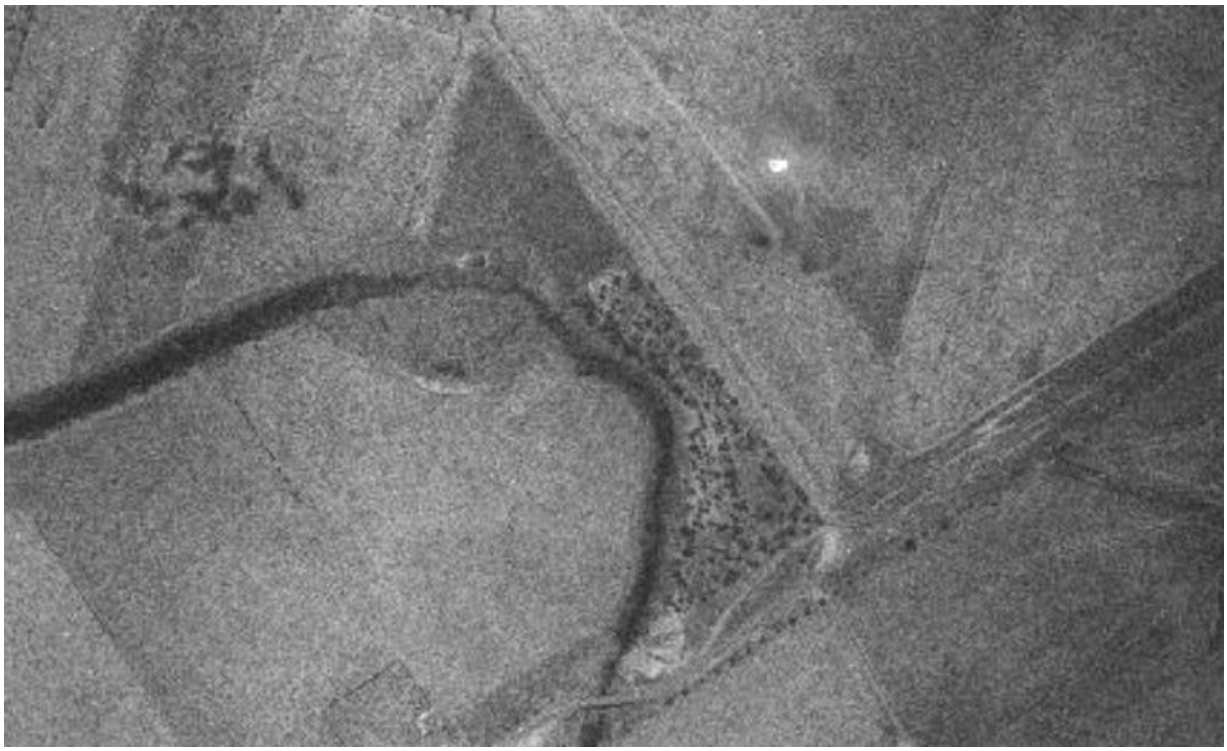


Figure 7. Rothwell Reserve from a 1931 aerial. *Source:* Unknown. 1931. 'Military Mapping Photography - Meredith, Melbourne.' Digitised photograph. Geoscience Australia. https://aerialphotography.ga.gov.au/Scanned/MAP/MAP2067/Preview/MAP2067_frame5102_preview.jpg

Police Reserve – Land Abutting Rothwell Reserve

Sometime in the 1860s or 1870s, the 4 acres of land abutting the area later known as Rothwell Reserve was designated as a Police Reserve (Figure 8). The area of Rothwell Reserve remained publicly accessible as part of the Farmers' Common. It is understood that the Police Reserve was used as a paddock for police horses.

In 1890, the four acres designated as a Police Reserve was opened for private sale. This change occurred simultaneously with the official designation of Rothwell Reserve (Victorian Government Gazette 1890, p.3733). At this time, a suitable location for a state school was being contemplated by Councillors. In c.1894, the land of the former Police Reserve was selected for the school, which remained there until 1916 at which time it was relocated to Flinders Street in Little River (The Bacchus Marsh Express 1894, 3; Les Sanderson Pers. Comm. 2009).

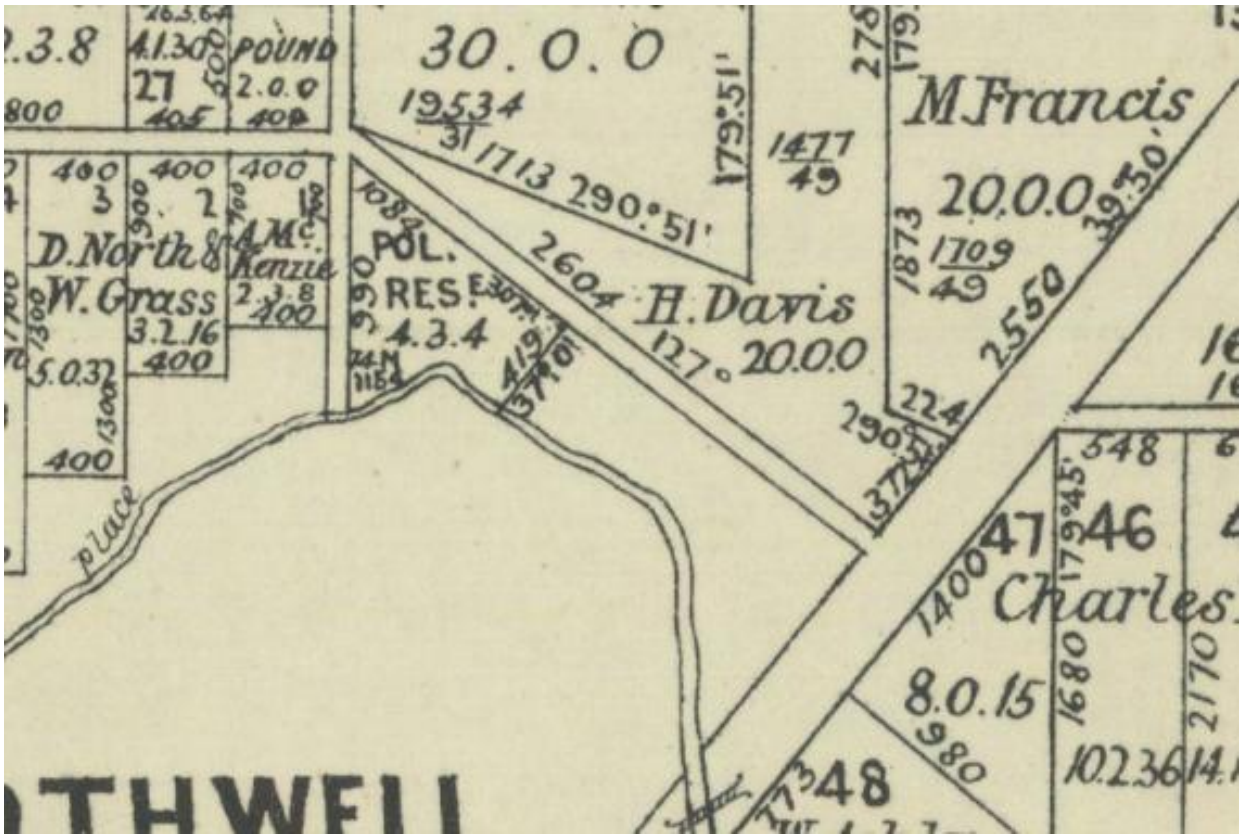


Figure 8. Extract from the Bulban parish plan, showing the Police Reserve abutting the Farmers' Common land, later attributed to Rothwell Reserve. Source: J. Noone. 1879. 'Bulban County of Grant.' Map. https://mapwarper.prov.vic.gov.au/maps/8190

Comparative Analysis

Rothwell Reserve is comparable to the following places:

McNaughton Reserve (HO121)

Rothwell Reserve is directly comparable to McNaughton Reserve which comprises a forested reserve of sugar gums with some European specimens. Both reserves are in designated land adjoining Little River with collections of sugar gums that have been subject to pollarding, and which have been present in the reserves for over 100 years. The two reserves directly comparable both historically, and in their contemporary presentation.

Kelly Park (HO16)

Rothwell Reserve is comparable to Kelly Park as a designated public park. While arising from different needs, both were designated to serve the community and provide for open space. In considering the tree plantings, both Kelly Park and Rothwell Reserve include plantings of indigenous and exotic species. Rothwell Reserve however includes vast plantings of sugar gums which are more typical to Little River.

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Images



Figure 9. View of Rothwell Reserve from Rothwell Road. Source: Extent Heritage



Figure 10. The internal road and parking spaces within Rothwell Reserve. Source: Extent Heritage



Figure 11. The western extent of the reserve where it joins Little River. Source: Extent Heritage

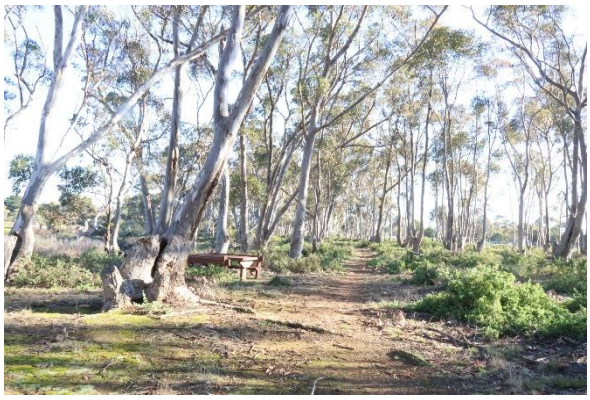


Figure 12. Informal walking tracks within Rothwell Reserve. Source: Extent Heritage