

Batman Apple Tree & Pioneer Children's Cemetery, along the Plenty River behind Corowa Crescent, Greensborough



History

The Batman Apple Tree

The purpose of this history is to assemble the available documentary evidence on Batman's apple tree into a coherent whole, so that the provenance of the tree can be assessed. It is hoped that this will also provide an armature for any additional evidence that comes to light in the future. The history is structured as a chronology, both of the tree itself and of the developing story and memorialisation of the tree.

John Batman's Orchard

In April 1836 John Batman and his family arrived in Melbourne to settle permanently. His wooden house brought from Van Diemen's Land was already nearly complete on the twenty-acre hillside block known as 'Batman's Paddock', which as a member of the Port Phillip Association he had taken up as a squatting lease. Stores had been built and the gardens had been formed. By late 1836 men's quarters and a barn had been added. After the Sydney government knocked back his requests to acquire the land as a grant, in March 1838 he requested to be allowed to stay on the land at a moderate rent. In his letter to Governor Gipps on this matter, Batman stated that he had brought to the colony "upwards of one thousand fruit trees of every description, which are now in a highly flourishing state and from which I anticipate much benefit to the colony". (Billot, pp.195, 271-2. Cannon, p.17.) Such a number was not exceptional. John Pascoe Fawkner, who had been a nurseryman in Tasmania, reputedly brought 2,500 trees, most of which were planted at Emerald Hill. (*Argus*, 7 September 1937, p.10) Whether all of the fruit trees Batman brought over were planted on 'Batman's Paddock' is not known. Certainly there were a considerable number there. One account described an orchard of hundreds of trees. (Turner, p.197)

John Batman died in May 1939. In the following months Batman's executors held sales of his assets, which included a library, livestock, produce, his schooner *Gem* and a long list of other items. Fruit trees are not mentioned in the available excerpts of sale notices. (Billot p.275. Savill, pp.287-8) The government postponed taking over possession of the land until August 1841. (Cannon, p.34) From September 1939 Benjamin Baxter, postmaster, occupied the house for an annual rent of £100. It appears that he was farming the enclosed land, and in July 1841 applied for a further years lease at £150 per annum. The government insisted that all property held by

Batman estate should be removed before that date, but Baxter would be allowed to continue to lease the property with the proviso that he would leave on two months notice. This would enable him to harvest the crops that he had planted. It is likely that the trees in Batman's orchard remained in the ground while Batman's house and garden were leased to Baxter. The government took possession of the land after Baxter's crops had been taken in, and paid Batman's estate £200 in compensation for his improvements. (Billot, p.275. Cannon, p.17, pp.35-6) This places the sale of the trees from Batman's orchard at around September 1841. Benjamin Baxter is also said to have purchased the "crop and orchard" of the Batman estate for £287, in which case Flintoff would have purchased the trees from Baxter, rather than Batman's estate. (Book on Batman author unknown, p.224)

In 1890 T. Flintoff remembered purchasing a number of fruit trees from Batman's orchard for £1 apiece in September 1841. In the account in an article in *Evelyn Observer* in 1890, he also remembered transferring these fruit trees to his orchard on the banks of the Plenty River. (*Evelyn Observer and South and East Bourke Record*, 28 February 1890, p.3) This conjunction forms the most reliable available starting point for the history of what is now known as Batman's apple. Significantly, this article was not known to most of the subsequent commentators on the Batman apple tree up to and including W.A. Rolfe in 1966.

If the fruit trees brought from Launceston were planted in Batman's orchard in 1835 or 1836 they would have been five to six years old when bought by Flintoff, again just as he remembered in 1890. (EO&S&EBR, 28 February 1890, p.3) Presumably a mixture of trees was purchased, including some apples.

In a 1933 interview the daughter of Frederick Flintoff recounted that her father was a personal friend of Batman, and the surviving tree was one of two purchased from Batman and planted in 1838 by Flintoff. (Prescott, 1942, p.27) Neither the friendship nor the purchase at that date is possible because Flintoff did not arrive from England until early 1841, well after Batman's death.

The arrival of the Flintoffs and Bateys and the orchard on the Plenty River

In January 1841 Edward Theodore Flintoff and family and his brother Frederick Niven Flintoff and his wife arrived in Melbourne on the ship the Fergusson. On the same ship were Martin Batey and his family. ('Pioneers of the Sunbury district', volume in the Isaac Batey manuscript collection, SLV.) Martin's son Isaac later stated that the Flintoffs were "gentlemen by birth and nature". Edward Theodore Flintoff had employed Batey in England before he came to Australia. Batey would become Edward Theodore Flintoff's manager for the following four years, and would then work for Frederick Flintoff for a brief period after 1845 (Batey, *Sunbury News*, 29 August 1903. Batey, *Sunbury News*, 1 October 1910). In 1846 it was reported that Flintoff's property on the Plenty was destroyed by bushfire, with only the house remaining. Flintoff was financially ruined. (*SMH*, 18 March 1846 p.2. Batey, *Sunbury News*, 2 May 1903 p.3; 12 September 1903 p.4) Elsewhere Isaac Batey added that following the fire Edward Theodore Flintoff had sold his land and returned to England. (Batey, *Sunbury News*, 1 October 1910) Whether this was the case, and whether he returned to Victoria, has not been established. Most subsequent sources place Frederick Flintoff as the owner of the land on the Plenty River where the orchard stood. Nonetheless, the T. Flintoff who was interviewed for the 1890 article may have been Edward Theodore. In 1937 his great niece Edith Wilson referred to him as Theodore rather than Edward. (*Argus*, 15 September 1937 p.19)

In the 1890 interview T. Flintoff remembered planting the trees from Batman's orchard first "in the Greensborough district" before they were transplanted to the garden on the Flintoff's land. (EO&S&EBR, 28 February 1890, p.3) Draper notes that settlers often established a small fruit tree nursery while their orchard land was being cleared and prepared for cultivation. (Draper) The Flintoffs might have established a similar interim nursery on their initial rented property in the Plenty Valley. Historian of the Diamond Creek area Dianne Edwards found that the Flintoffs first leased land in the Greensborough area, until in 1844 they could purchase part of the portion of land on the Plenty River first bought by F.D. Wickham. (Edwards, p.34) Francis D. Wickham from Launceston had obtained the 1060 acre (430 hectare) Portion 14 Nillumbik in 1841 and sold it on to Alison and Knight in 1843. (Edwards, p.24) W.A. Rolfe thought it likely that Wickham had been occupying this land prior to the Crown Grant, which had actually occurred in 1840. (Rolfe pp.22-3. *The Australian*, 12 March 1840 p.2) Presumably the Flintoffs bought a part of Wickham's land in 1844. In one of his many reminiscences in the *Sunbury News*, Isaac Batey, son of the

Flintoff's manager Martin Batey, wrote that the Flintoff brothers had bought 320 acres (130 hectares) at £5 per acre from Alison and Knight, who were millers in Melbourne. (*Sunbury News*, 8 August 1903 p.4) The Flintoff property became known as 'Brancepeth Farm', with the farmhouse "about five minutes walk" up the hill from the orchard by the river. (*EO&S&EBR*, 14 March 1890 p.3)

E.E. Pescott believed that Flintoff had ordered his "bailiff" Martin Batey to plant a single apple tree as a memorial to Batman. (*Argus*, 15 September 1937 p.3. Pescott, p.27) The improbability of anyone making a memorial to Batman so soon after his death is explored in detail below. But it is quite likely that Batey planted the trees purchased by Edward Theodore Flintoff from Batman's Melbourne garden. Batey had commenced work on Flintoff's Greensborough properties immediately after arriving in the colony, and he took his family there once housing was built, in March 1841. (Batey, *Sunbury News*, 29 August 1903) Batey stayed on the successive Greensborough properties as Flintoff's manager until 1845, punctuated and followed by some other unsuccessful ventures for the Flintoffs, before he himself purchased an estate named Red Stone Hill, east of Jacksons Creek near Sunbury. (Batey, *Sunbury News*, 2 May 1903 p.3) The Flintoffs remained on Brancepeth farm until c1890, when the farm was let to Mr Jas. Black. At this time the farm's rich volcanic soil was said to be productive for cereals and hay. Mr F Flintoff was at this time resident at "Oldstead" in Greensborough. (*EO&S&EBR*, 14 March 1890 p.3)

The orchards of the Whatmoughs and Partingtons

Robert William Whatmough was born in Lancashire in 1815, and died in Diamond Creek in 1887. He married Mary Hill and they had their first child before leaving for Australia c1842. His son Robert Emmett, the second child of ten, was born in Melbourne in 1842. Reputedly Robert William was for a year or two the first lamplighter in Melbourne. He also reputedly grew the first apple trees (in Melbourne?) from cuttings from trees brought by Governor Latrobe. (*Advertiser (Hurstbridge)*, 29 August 1924 p.3)

Robert William Whatmough and his family were certainly living in the Plenty River valley by 1845, and possibly as early as 1843. His daughter Sarah (later Sarah Wilson) was born there in 1845. (*Advertiser (Hurstbridge)*, 3 August 1934 p.2) Around 1857 Robert's sister Ellen and her husband Charles Partington joined the Whatmoughs on the Plenty River. The Whatmoughs rented the property Willis Vale, possibly from 1863, and at some point, possibly 1878, the Partingtons bought this property. In the early 1840s James Willis Mayger was the first to purchase the land at Willis Vale. He built the gabled two-storey house from locally made bricks. (Edwards, p.65. *Advertiser (Hurstbridge)*, 9 December 1932 p.5. Brochure for Banyule City Council Spring Outdoors Programme 2008 - Greensborough & the Plenty River Pioneer Trail With Dennis Ward & Noel Withers)

Whatmough rented Flintoff's orchard from the early 1850s or earlier. In a 1924 article in the *Argus* Mr Whatmore, probably Robert Emmet Whatmough, remembered picking 40 bushels from this apple tree in 1851. (*Argus*, 6 June 1924 p.13) Mr Whatmough snr was running the orchard during the 1850s gold rush period, when it was said to have brought in £700 per year. (*EO&S&EBR*, 28 February 1890 p.3) Pescott wrote that when first letting the orchard to Whatmough, Flintoff "urged Whatmough to guard and protect the [apple] tree, and not let it be destroyed". Presumably this was gleaned from the comments of Frederick Flintoff's daughter Edith when Pescott interviewed her in 1933. (Pescott, p.27) Whatmough's Plenty River apples were on show at the markets in Hobart in 1856, where it was noted that they "demonstrate[d] beyond doubt the capabilities of the colony". (*Courier (Hobart)*, 22 February 1856 p.3; 28 February 1856 p.4)

Robert Whatmough organised a job for Charles Partington on the Flintoff's property in 1858. A letter from Flintoff to Partington shows that as late as 1872 Flintoff was renting a small garden and paddock to Partington for £30 per year. Flintoff then extended the lease from seven to fourteen years so that the Partingtons could "feel it is a home to do what you like". (Edwards, p.35) In the "great flood" of 1878 Charles Partington's rented orchard was severely damaged. Robert William Whatmough's daughter Sarah recalled that an apple tree from this orchard, with such a heavy crop that it required 36 props, had been washed down the river. (*Advertiser (Hurstbridge)*, 3 August 1934 p.2) It seems that the two families lived in close conjunction for many years. The private cemetery not far from Batman's apple with graves of children of both

families from 1845-1858 is evocative of this connection. (From material compiled by the Greensborough Historical Society)

By the 1860s Robert William Whatmough had become a prominent orchardist and nurseryman. He regularly auctioned fruit trees, forest and ornamental trees and shrubs in Melbourne. (e.g. *Argus*, 6 June 1861 p.2) He was a founding member of the Horticultural Society of Victoria and regularly contributed to and won prizes at their exhibitions. (*Argus*, 8 March 1859 p.5; 11 August 1864 p.4; 5 February 1869 p.6; 6 April 1871 p.6) But despite all his knowledge of fruit trees, Whatmough had to coin a new name, 'Whatmough's Fancy', for the apples from the tree that would later become known as the Batman apple. If he didn't know the variety, it is unlikely that he planted it himself, indicating that it probably predated his occupation of the site c1845. The tree was as prolific as ever in 1867, yielding "immense crops" according to eyewitnesses reminiscing in the 1920s. (*Argus*, 6 June 1924 p.13) 'Whatmough's Fancy' first appears in *Argus* reports on the Horticultural Society's exhibitions in 1872. (*Argus*, 4 April 1872 p.6) A wax model of a Whatmoughs Fancy apple made in the 1870s is now held at the Museum of Victoria.

Pescott wrote that at some unspecified time Robert William Whatmough's son Robert Emmet had taken over the orchard and carried on the tradition of the tree. (Pescott, p.27) An *Evelyn Observer* report has Robert Emmet spending some of his early years "trapping" in the Plenty Ranges and then settling on the Plenty River two miles from Greensborough, where he "selected an area and planted it with fruit trees, which are still flourishing". He died in Cottles Bridge in 1924. (*Advertiser (Hurstbridge)*, 29 August 1924 p.3) Further research including into rate books and titles may reveal a clearer picture of the various lengths of tenures and the locations of the relevant orchards and residences in this period.

1890 - Mr Carr's orchard

In 1890 the river-side orchard and Brancepeth farm were among the subjects of a two part article published in the *Evelyn Observer*, titled 'The Garden of Victoria: In and around the valley of the Diamond Creek'. By 1879 the Whatmoughs had handed over the lease of the orchard to Mr Carr, who was present for the 1890 reporter's visit along with Mr T. Flintoff. The larger Flintoff property of 200 acres (80 hectares) was now owned by Mr F. Flintoff jnr. (Draper)

Significantly there is no mention in the 1890 articles of any 'Batman memorial tree'. Rather the statement is that the majority of trees of the original orchard were purchased from the sale of the fruit trees from John Batman's garden in September 1841. The orchard visited in 1890 must have included some trees planted in the first years by the Flintoffs or Batey, plus others planted by Whatmough over the subsequent forty-five years. Flintoff stated at this point that "many" of the Batman trees, although 53 or 54 years old, were still bearing fruit. To the reporter's eye, however, the orchard of seven acres (2.8 hectares) now appeared to be "worn out", with yields of many trees now low compared to when in their prime. Many of the old trees had been cut down to stumps and allowed to produce vigorous new wood. The stumps were as much as eighteen inches (0.46m) in diameter. Mr Carr stated that the orchard had 65 varieties of trees when he came to it, and that he had reduced this to 22 or 23 varieties. He also intended to reduce their numbers further. (*EO&S&EBR*, 28 February 1890, p.3) A 1910 *Leader* Article reported that twenty years earlier (i.e. in 1890) what was by then known as the Batman tree had been cut back and grafted with the Rymer variety. The crevices in the trunk had been filled with cement mortar. (*The Leader (Melbourne)*, 25 October 1910)

1898 - 1913 The orchard of Mr Bosch (later John Bush)

In a 1910 account of a visit to the orchard in the presence of the new owner Mr Bosch and Mr Whatmough (Robert Emmet), the tree was described as one of two purchased from the orchard of Mr John Batman and planted in 1838 by Mr Flintoff. (*Leader [Melbourne]*, 9 April 1910 p.25) According to Mrs Sarah Wilson, [Edward] Theodore Flintoff's niece (Frederick's daughter) sold the garden c1900. (*Argus*, 15 September 1937 p.3) An article in *The Leader* in 1913 stated that Mr Bosch had by now been in possession for fifteen years, indicating that he had bought the property c1898. Bosch recounted that when he first took over the land there was an old orchard "which had never done any good". Although advised not to grow fruit, he had taken out most of the old trees and replaced them with new. (*The Leader (Melbourne)*, 22 November 1913 cited in Draper) One old tree was to be spared, a prolific apple. A 1924 account relates that the Batman tree had borne such a heavy crop in 1910 that several large limbs had broken. (*Argus*, 6 June 1924 p.13)

Mr Bosch was clearly interested in keeping this tree, but was planning to cut it at its base and graft with Rome Beauty to lengthen its life. (*Leader [Melbourne]*, 9 April 1910 p.25)

It appears that Edward E Pescott, then the principal of Burnley Horticultural College, had recommended the graft during a visit to the orchard in 1910, when Mr Bosch had first shown him what he called "the Batman tree". Bosch's terminology might have been indicating that it was the surviving tree from a number of Batman trees. Pescott later pointed out that he had not heard of any connections made between Batman and the tree before 1910. (Pescott, p.27) He had obviously not seen the 1890 articles in the *Evelyn Observer*. The 1913 *Leader* article reveals that the cutting and grafting had been done in the intervening period. "Among the younger trees is an old veteran, sole survivor of the original orchard. It was a Rymer apple, but has recently been cut back and grafted to Rome Beauty." (*The Leader (Melbourne)*, 22 November 1913 cited in Draper)

The 1910 article included a photograph of the tree captioned "An ancient apple tree at Greensborough (72 years old)" (*The Leader (Melbourne)*, 9 April 1910) 'Ancient trees' had emerged as a category of interest in Britain in the eighteenth century. Simon Schama describes how "these blasted patriarchs ... were vegetable proclamations of British immortality." (Schama p.170) Batman's apple possessed some of this blasted quality. Colonials were highly conscious of their newcomer status in Australia, and opportunities to demonstrate ancient status here were especially welcome.



AN ANCIENT APPLE TREE AT GREENSBOROUGH (72 Years Old).

(R. G. Brown, Photo.)

Image: George Mitchell, Johannes Adam Bosch & Robert Emmet Whatmough in front of the apple tree
Source: *Leader (Melbourne)* 9th April 1910, p. 25.

1924 - A lone tree in Mr Bush's orchard

By 1924 the story of the lone Batman tree was apparently getting wider circulation, as it was reported in an *Argus* article that it was now "frequently inspected by interested visitors". The graft was successful, with Mr Bush describing the yield as "of first class quality". The tree, now about twenty feet (6m) high and with a maximum girth of five feet (1.5m), was now smaller than when

Bush had taken over the property. (*Argus*, 6 June 1924 p.13) (Johan Bosch had changed his name to John Bush, no doubt spurred by anti-German sentiment during the First World War) If this tree alone had been kept in preference to the others originating in Batman's garden, its vigour and the immense crops that it yielded probably had much to do with it.

A c1921-23 photograph held by the Greensborough Historical Society shows a Mrs Greenwood sitting under the dense canopy of the tree holding two different varieties of apple. The Greenwoods are said to have share-farmed with J.A. Bosch during this period.

1930s - The tree as a memorial

Evidence of the appreciation of the tree as an intentional memorial planted to honour Batman begins with Pescott's interview of Flintoff's daughter in 1933. Her recollection was that Flintoff had ordered Batey to plant the tree "as a memorial to his friend Batman". The weight of the earlier evidence of Flintoff's purchase of a number of trees from Batman is enough to suggest that this was an elaborated memory. The wider memorialising of John Batman has its own history, one that lends little support to the idea that Flintoff planted the tree as a memorial in the 1840s. It was not until 1867 that James Bonwick sought to "vindicate the character" of Batman in his book *John Batman: The Founder of Melbourne*. At the end of the book he asked: "Where is the monument to his honour?" (Bonwick, p.103) Formal memorials to Batman did not appear for more than forty years after his death. In 1882, following the efforts of historian John J. Shillingaw, a monument was finally erected over Batman's grave at the old Melbourne Cemetery. (Billot, pp.284-5)

In the 1880s an argument erupted over the location of the signing of Batman's treaty, which had always been notoriously unclear in the account in Batman's journal. In 1883 Bonwick argued for Merri Creek, Northcote. In 1885 James Blackburn argued for the banks of the Plenty River "northwest of the Village of Eltham, and about three miles above the junction of the Plenty with the River Yarra". (Duncan, p.1. Blackburn, *Fitzroy City Press*, 16 January 1886 p.4) In 1907 Henry Gyles Turner retraced Batman's steps and concluded in a paper read before the Geographical Society that the treaty was signed on the banks of the Plenty River. (*Argus*, 18 November 1939 p.8)

The argument has continued. In 1985 geographer Dr J. Stuart Duncan again painstakingly recreated Batman's journey and concluded that the most likely place was in between the two, on Edgar's Creek near Thomastown. (Duncan) In his 1987 book *John Batman and the Aborigines* Dr Alastair Campbell argued for Darebin Creek. (Campbell) In 2001 John Harcourt argued again for Merri Creek in his book *Southern Invasion - Northern Conquest: Story of the Founding of Melbourne*. (Harcourt) Since then, debate over the location of the 'treaty' signing has been consigned to the background. Much more attention is now devoted to, as A.G.L Shaw put it in 1996, "the more important question ... - what did they signify?" (Shaw, p.46) In James Boyce's 2012 history *1835: The founding of Melbourne and the conquest of Australia*, the location of the signing is not discussed at all.

Pescott noted in 1942 that by this time locals had connected the tree with the notion that Batman's treaty had been signed at this location on the Plenty River. There are no indications, however, that the Plenty River location for the treaty signing was genuinely local lore. It is more likely that the information was obtained from the publications of the various researchers. Pescott himself dismissed the theory that the tree was a memorial to Batman's treaty signing. Nor is there much evidence in contemporary local newspapers of interest in Plenty River as the treaty site. In 1927 a Mr D Medhurst spoke at the Greensborough hall on the topic of the treaty. By his calculations it had been signed on the banks of the River Plenty, and he proposed that a memorial should be erected there. (*Advertiser (Hurstbridge)*, 17 September 1926) While this did not materialise, there were a considerable number of Batman memorials erected elsewhere in Victoria in the 1920s and 30s, including at Indented Head, at his landing site at the corner of Flinders and William Street, at the junction of the Maribyrnong and Yarra Rivers, and in the Fawkner Cemetery. A Plenty River treaty site is mentioned in the *Hurstbridge Advertiser* article on the event of the death of Sarah Wilson, Robert William Whatmough's daughter, but it is not connected to the apple tree. (*Advertiser (Hurstbridge)*, 3 August 1934) Nor is any connection of the tree to the treaty site mentioned in the 1937 *Argus* articles.

Interest in the tree stepped up a notch in 1937 when there were three articles in quick succession in the *Argus*, all relating to a talk about Batman's apple given by Edward E. Pescott to the Nurserymen and Seedsmen's Association. (*Argus*, 7 September 1937 p.10; 8 September 1937

p.19; 15 September 1937 p.3) One of the articles introduces an interesting metaphorical flourish that illustrates the developing 'ancient tree' theme surrounding Batman's apple. This theme had first emerged in the 1910 article in *The Leader*. (See above) The Tree Planters Association of Victoria and other authorities were making efforts to have "... the old tree, whose roots go deep into the past of Victoria, preserved against the onslaughts of time". (*Argus*, 8 September 1937 p.19) Similarly, in another article the tree was described as "timeworn and somewhat bedraggled, but still flourishing after 100 years". (*Argus*, 7 September 1937 p.10)

In the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century Australian newspapers published a plethora of articles about famous trees both in Australia and overseas, and the Batman tree must have been seen in the light of that more general interest. In one of the 1937 *Argus* articles the Granny Smith tree was raised as an analogy for Batman's apple. The author asserted that just like the Granny Smith tree the Batman apple was "likely to become a place of pilgrimage for Victorian horticulturalists". (*Argus*, 15 September 1937 p.19) The tree from which the Granny Smith variety originated was a seedling from an apple taken home to an orchard in Eastwood, a suburb of Sydney, by "Granny" Smith in 1868. It had subsequently spread around the world. There were calls in the 1930s for a monument to be erected to "Granny Smith". (*SMH*, 29 November 1933 p.18) Like the Granny Smith tree, all of the Cling peach trees in Victoria were said to have originated from Mr Phillip Pullar's Cling peach tree, a seedling planted in Ardmona in 1892. (*Argus*, 28 April 1933 p.3)

But the Batman apple was never famous as the origin of a variety. Aside from the Batman connection, it became more famous for its great age. A more apposite comparison would be with America's oldest fruit tree, a pear, which had grown in Salem since the 1600s. This American tree had been the subject of articles in many Australian newspapers in 1916-17. (E.g. *Camperdown Chronicle*, 21 June 1916 p.5) The Batman apple had been touted as the "Victoria's oldest fruit tree" in two of the 1937 articles. (*Argus*, 8 September 1937 p.19; 15 September 1937 p.19)

Formal recognition was now being considered for Batman's apple. Pescott suggested that the tree should be preserved as a "State memorial". (*Argus*, 15 September 1937 p.3) The Heidelberg Council was to be asked to take steps to preserve the tree. Pescott suggested that a "tablet" detailing the history of the tree should be placed on the trunk. (*Argus*, 8 September 1937 p.19) The Council had already considered purchasing the land on which the tree stood in 1933, when the matter had been placed before the "Centenary Executive", presumably for the Melbourne and Victoria Centenary in 1934. (*Advertiser (Hurstbridge)*, 23 June 1933 p.3)

The 1937 articles also noted that two Whatmough children were buried in unmarked graves close to Batman's apple. The subsequent owner Bosch had ploughed the land where they lay. (*Argus*, 7 September 1937 p.10; 15 September 1937 p.3) Pescott mentions the graves again in his 1942 article, by which time the numbers had risen to "two or three". He added that the alignment of the pipeline had been altered when it was built so as not to disturb the graves. (Pescott, p.28)

1940s to the present – Expert interest.

Pescott was only the first of a series of horticultural experts who now researched the tree. He published an article on Batman's apple in a 1942 issue of *The Victorian Naturalist*, the journal of the Field Naturalists' Club. Pescott was a past president and later life member of the club. He was inspired by a recent "rediscovery" of the tree, but unfortunately did not reveal the source of this inspiration. Pescott's interest in the history of fruit growing was much wider than the Batman Apple, as he had also published *Pioneers of Horticulture in Victoria* in 1940. (McLaren)

When W.A. Rolfe, who Senior Horticultural Advisor with the Department of Agriculture, researched Batman's apple in 1966 the orchard had been removed and the apple tree was growing unattended in a paddock, but was in good health and still bearing fruit. Locals told him the apple variety was "Roma" (meaning Rymer?) or "Whatmores Fancy". Rolfe concluded that the wood above the graft was Rymer, and that the wood below was possibly Winter Maetjin. (Rolfe, p.21) Winter Maetjin was a Norfolk apple variety dating to 1820. (Draper)

Rolfe questioned a number of local residents and descendants of the Bateys and Flintoffs about the tree, without much reward. He did find that a headmaster of the Greensborough School from 1895 to 1925 had taught his pupils that the old tree was the Batman tree. One old pupil said that

a previous teacher had also taught that this was the Batman tree. Rolfe concluded that he was "fairly certain" that this was an original Batman tree. (Rolfe, p24)

In the most recent article on the tree in the journal *Australian Garden History*, Bruce Draper reviewed the available evidence and found the 1890 article provided the best basis for assessing the origins of the tree. He concluded it was likely that this was one of the original Batman apple trees, and possibly the oldest living apple tree in the State. (Draper)

Conclusion

The testimony of Mr T. Flintoff in the 1890 *Evelyn Observer* article provides the best starting point for assessing the provenance of this tree. When the rest of the available evidence is reviewed in the light of this starting point, a consistent line can be traced. It seems likely that the tree that remains here originated in Batman's orchard.

That the tree was originally planted on the banks of the Plenty River as a memorial to Batman is much less likely, as is the proposition that it was originally planted as a memorial on the site of the signing of Batman's treaty. It is clear that the tree became progressively more valued as a memorial over time, especially after it had become the sole survivor of the original orchard. Most of the wood of the tree is no longer the same variety as the tree originally brought over to Victoria by Batman, with successive grafts having occurred, but it is clear that for most of the people who have valued the tree as a memorial over the years, this has not been an issue. Whether authentically Batman's apple or not, this tree has undergone a memorializing process that is an important part of the social history of this area. The perceptions of the tree that persist today are a hybrid, grafting together memories of the origin of the tree with a desire to memorialize a various persons and events of the past.

This memorialising of the Batman tree has occurred in a distinctively local and popular context. It relates to individual and local settlers and farmers. This homespun development sets it apart from other more formal memorialising efforts such as the various memorial oaks around the State devoted to royalty, most of which were planted by famous or important people. It also distinguishes it from many of the other more formal Batman memorials around the State. The Batman tree has more kinship with witness trees such as the Separation tree in the Melbourne Botanical Gardens.

Pioneer Children's Cemetery

Seven members of the Whatmough and Partington families are buried in unmarked graves within a private cemetery on the banks of the Plenty River.

Chartist Robert Whatmough and his family arrived in 1842, leaving England to escape political persecution. Around 1857 Robert's sister Ellen and her husband Charles Partington joined the Whatmoughs on the Plenty River. Whatmough leased the orchard along the Plenty River from around 1842 to 1887, which was established by the Flintoff family in 1841.

The cemetery contains the remains of seven young children of the Whatmough and Partington families who died between 1848 – 1860.

As part of the 150th Anniversary of the State of Victoria in 1985, a plaque was erected by the Rotary Club of Greensborough, close to the graves. At the time of erecting the memorial and plaque, a low fence was also constructed around the cemetery area and wooden crosses placed at each grave site. The crosses have since been removed.

Since the memorial was erected it was found that James Partington, originally thought to be buried in the private cemetery, was actually buried at Preston Cemetery and that Job Whatmough was buried here in April 1845.

Therefore the seven children thought to be buried at the site are as follows:

Job Whatmough	Died April 1845
James Whatmough	Died 1.2.1848
Margaret Whatmough	Died 24.3.1850
Mary Ann Whatmough	Died 24.3.1850

Mary Ann Whatmough	Died 11.11.1853
Benjamin Whatmough	Died 2.1.1855
Robert Partington	Died 1.2.1857 Aged 1 year 5 months
Jessie Whatmough	Died 2.9.1858

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Description

The Batman Apple Tree and Pioneer Cemetery are located on the eastern banks of the Plenty River adjacent to the Plenty River Trail, behind Corowa Crescent. The tree and cemetery are located approximately 100 metres apart with the Maroondah Aqueduct pipe bridge across the Plenty River, between the two sites.

The tree is located on a flat, grassed area directly behind (west of) 3 Leischa Court. It is a wide spreading multi stemmed tree and over the years has lost one or two stems. The tree canopy is approximately five metres high and nine metres wide. Brought over from Tasmania in 1836, the original apple variety is unknown but evidence suggests it was cut back and grafted to a *Rymer* in about 1890 (at this time the crevices and trunk were filled with cement mortar) and once again cut back and grafted to a *Rome Beauty* variety in about 1910.

The Pioneer Cemetery is located on sloping land directly behind (west of) 3 Lear Court. At the base of the slope is a concrete memorial with a plaque set into the concrete. The plaque contains the names of those buried in the cemetery. There is a low log post and rail fence marking the boundary of the graves site on the sloped land. A concrete path stemming from both directions off the Plenty River Trail leads to the memorial at the base of the slope.



Statement of Cultural Heritage Significance

What is significant?

The Batman Apple Tree and Pioneer Children's Cemetery located along the Plenty River behind Corowa Crescent, Greensborough.

How is it significant?

The Batman Apple Tree and Pioneer Children's Cemetery located along the Plenty River behind Corowa Crescent, Greensborough are of local historic and social significance to the Shire of Nillumbik.

Why is it significant?

The Batman Apple Tree is of local historical significance for its associations with Melbourne founder, John Batman. The tree was one of a number of fruit trees brought over by Batman from Tasmania in 1836 and planted as part of the orchard on his property known as *Batman's Paddock*. In 1841, after Batman's death in 1839, T. Flintoff purchased fruit trees from the sale of Batman's estate and planted them at his property on the banks of the Plenty River. The Batman Apple Tree is of historical significance as the only surviving tree from Flintoff's original orchard and as one of the trees brought to Victoria and planted by Batman in 1836. The tree is of historical significance for its demonstration of the pioneering settlement of the Greensborough area in the 1840s and for its associations with pioneering settlement families including the Flintoffs and the Whatmoughs. The Pioneer Children's Cemetery is of historical significance for its demonstration of the pioneering settlement of the Greensborough area in the 1840s and 1850s. The cemetery is significant for its associations with the Whatmough and Partington families who settled in the area in the 1840s and 1850s respectively. (Criteria A, B & H)

The Batman Apple Tree is of local social significance for the interest generated, and myth making surrounding investigations into its origins. Stories and investigations regarding the tree's origins have been the subject of a number of journal articles from the 1910s to the present day. The Batman Apple Tree and Pioneer Children's Cemetery are of social significance as they have become memorials to early settlement in the area and are highly valued by the local community as

important links to the past. The Pioneer Children's Cemetery is of social significance as a commemorative place for the Greensborough community and descendants of the Whatmough and Partington families. (Criterion G)