Place: **Cumberland**  
**Type:** Former - Dwelling (now ruinous); Archaeological Site.  
**Location:** in Gellibrand Hill Park, Greenvale  
**Critical Date(s):** Constructed c. early 1860s.  
**Historic Theme(s):** First Settlement; "The Land; Producing'; 'Landscape: Perceptions and Transformations'; 'Social and Civic Life'.  
**Previous Heritage Registration(s):** None  
**Recommended Level of Significance:** Local

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**Statement of Significance:**

The ruins of the former *Cumberland* homestead are of local historical and social significance. Although the homestead was not built until the 1860s, it provides a significant reminder of the early establishment of the property by the overlander William Coghill in the mid 1840s, and of the later ownership of the property by his son. The extent of the ruins give a good indication of the substantial size and sophisticated construction of the homestead, which was unusual for this era in the district. The ruins have the potential to provide information, both through archaeological investigation and through interpretation to the public, that will contribute to a greater understanding of the history of the post-contact occupation of the Bulla district and the region.

Under the later occupations of William Henry Croker and then Alexander McCracken, both prominent members of Victoria's racing industry, *Cumberland* became an important centre for many social activities of the Oaklands Hunt Club in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

By virtue of its ruinous condition the place also conveys a sense of the passage of time, and of bygone eras and landuses.
Description:

The Cumberland homestead was once an imposing two storey bluestone house, with a single storey kitchen block attached at the rear. Its layout and picturesque, rustic Gothic Revival styling was probably derived from the popular pattern books of the day.

The front facade featured a bay room extension two storeys high, with an additional projecting bay window to the ground floor, and a short front verandah at the entrance porch. The steeply pitched gabled roofs were of slate and the gables of the roofs and the second storey dormer windows featured elaborate decorative timber bargeboards and finials. The tall bluestone and brick chimneys featured medieval looking chimney pots.

The building is now ruinous but its footprint can clearly be seen - many of the walls of the main house are still intact to about a half a metre in height and they show that the undressed bluestone blocks were laid in a brick-like pattern. Larger blocks at the corners of the building were dressed. The kitchen block to the rear is virtually at ground level but the massive brick and bluestone kitchen chimney is still substantially intact although it is threatened by a tree growing next to it. The external face of the chimney is also remarkably untouched and shows that the bluestone blocks were tuckpointed. There is an underground well with a brick dome to the rear of the former kitchen block.

Various plantings near the front of the house, probably the remnants of an early garden, are also of interest. Prominent among these are the *Agave americana*.

While the evidence below suggests that the Coghills may have settled on the property as early as the mid 1840s, other new evidence suggests that the mansion is likely to have been built in the early 1860s. Its decorated gothic style could have been built over a wide date range. The 1875 *Greystones* mansion at Bacchus Marsh, of the Coghills' close neighbour Molesworth Greene, is of this same style.

History:

The ruins of the former Cumberland homestead are located on what was known as Section 7 of the Parish of Will Will Rook, an area of 880 acres purchased from the Crown by Thomas Wills of Yarraville for £429 on 31 January 1839. Various transactions over the next few years between Wills and a number of mortgagees and lessees obscures the early ownership and use of the land. The matter was clarified in February 1854 when the section was entirely transferred into the ownership of a William Coghill; in 1845 Coghill had taken over William Harper's mortgaged share of the lease of the property. It has been suggested that, on this basis, the former Cumberland mansion may date between the 1850s (the first known use of the name Cumberland) and the 1880s.

In fact, it would seem that Coghill actually owned much of this section by September 1846, which was when he made a will leaving 'Section 7 Parish of Will Will Rook known as Cumberland Estate' to his wife along with all stock, farming implements, household goods, and other belongings. There is other evidence that the land to the east of Woodlands homestead was known as Cumberland at least by 1846. In that year The Argus referred to the granite which had been quarried from 'the Cumberland Estate' (at Gellibrand's Hill, then a part of this land holding) in 1844 for construction of the William Street Government Offices.

Little appears to be known about William Coghill's background other than that he was born in 1774, and was possibly a Captain or maybe a deportee. The Coghill family came

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2 Lennon, *op cit*, p 52
3 PROV, VPRS 7591/P1, Unit 11, Record 239 of Series 3 - Will of George Coghill.
4 The Argus, 25/9/1846.
5 Personal conversation with Lester Stephens (Researcher, Port Phillip Pioneers Association).
overland to Port Phillip from the Monaro Plains in New South Wales, leaving in November 1837 with 2000 sheep. In August 1838, they settled at a station called Glendonald on Coghills Creek remaining there until June 1849, after which they are said to have moved to Tullamarine. Son George become a very large pastoralist in his own right, establishing himself on the Loddon, or Pine Hill run 1845-56, at Pannebonawar 1851-54, and with his brother-in-law, HM Simpson, at Terrick Terrick in 1854-56. George and his brother David also had pastoral interests in unsold crown land adjacent to Cumberland, on the site which is now part of the airport. Numerous other pastoralists with large upcountry runs also settled permanently in the study area.

It is possible that the Coghill family lived on the Cumberland Estate soon after William took possession of the lease in 1845. Given William Coghill's will, and the other evidence, it would appear that they had taken possession of the property at least by 1849. However, other evidence suggests that their dwelling at this time was not the large home now in ruins. That they occupied some sort of homestead on the property by 1850 is evidenced by a letter from Coghill's nephew, Donald, written from Cumberland in October 1850.

In the letter Donald remarked on his uncle's landowning success, describing one of his properties as having about 1200 acres of land located some twelve miles from Melbourne. This was Coghill's Cumberland farm, which had been increased in size by his acquisition of the adjacent 500 or so acres of Section 16 in the Parish of Tullamarine. This Section had originally been acquired from the Crown by Archibald Walker in 1842. In his letter, Donald also mentioned that his three female cousins lived with their parents at Cumberland and that one of his cousins, George Coghill, had established himself on land a little to the south.

George Coghill's property encompassed the 448 acres of Section 17B of the Parish of Tullamarine, which he purchased from the Crown in December 1848, and the adjacent 492 acres of Section 13A of the Parish of Tullamarine, which he and John P.Fawtkner purchased in December 1850. George was resident at Tullamarine at least by 1848. On the site which is presently part of the Glenara Forest, within Tullamarine Airport, pastoral run files indicate that the Coghills held a licence for a run at Tullamarine from 1844, and in 1848 section 17B of the Parish of Tullamarine was granted to George Coghill as a pre-emptive right. In 1847, the year George married, he was living at 'Glencairn', which was then described as being at 'Moonee Ponds'. In 1848 he was living at Tullamarine, most likely at the airport site, though possibly with his parents and sisters at nearby Cumberland. By 1851 his mortgage on Section 17B required him to insure all buildings to the amount of £1000, a condition not required on his 1849 mortgage on the site, suggesting that he may have built on his own property (ie, Glencairn, on the airport site) at about this time. The inflated amount of the mortgage (£1000) also suggests that improvements may have taken place. Donald's 1850 letter mentions that George was living about 2 miles south of his parents' Cumberland property, and had a boiling down establishment, confirming that he was living on the present airport site. By September 1852 Coghill was giving his address as 'Glencairn, in the Parish of Tullamarine'.

The Glencairn homestead, now a ruin on the airport site, would thus appear to have been built sometime between 1844 and 1851, probably in stages, with fairly primitive structures until

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7 Stephens, op.cit.
8 Lennon, op.cit., p.52-53.
9 Current Parish Plan, Parish of Tullamarine, CPO.
10 ibid.
11 Gary Vines, Grey Box Forest Survey: Grey Box Forest Ecological and Cultural Heritage Project, Cultural Heritage Study and Management Proposal (Melbourne's Living Museum of the West Inc. c.1996), p.28
12 Stephens, op cit.
13 PROV, VPRS 460, Unit 491, TA 5518
14 ibid.
freehold was obtained in late 1848. It is possible that George had lived at Cumberland prior to this.

William Coghill died at 'Cumberland Farm', as his probate papers called it, in July 1860 leaving his wife Christine, and their sons David and George to run the farm. Some years later, in December 1868, David sold the property - Section 7 in the Parish of Will Will Rook and Section 16 in the Parish of Tullamarine - to a Richard Colclough (the brother of Thomas Colclough of Marnong [see Site Report M/09]) for £7,000, a sum that perhaps indicates the existence of the substantial Cumberland homestead. A Bulla contemporary, Isaac Batey, wrote in 1907 that 'after the decease of Coghill Senior, Cumberland fell into the hands of his son Donald who erected a costly house and it would appear the land was mortgaged up to the hilt'.

It is worth noting that Batey's use of the name Donald may not have been a mistake, because it is the same name used in the rate book entries for the property in the years 1863/64 and 1864/65. It would appear that the now ruined Cumberland homestead was built sometime in the early 1860s by a Donald (or maybe a David) Coghill. (David and Donald might have been the same person, or Donald might have been David's cousin, who wrote the October 1850 letter). Remains of the earlier homestead first lived in by the Coghill family may come to light with further investigation.

From the latter nineteenth century the Cumberland estate was variously divided up, leased to different owners by a financial institution, or combined with Woodlands by different owners. After acquiring the Cumberland property, Richard Colclough owned it for only about five years before selling it to Charles Brown Fisher for £15,648 on 13 December 1873. Two days earlier Fisher had also acquired the neighbouring property, Woodlands [see Site Report BB/11]. In the years of Fisher's ownership of Cumberland, the property is variously described in the Shire of Broadmeadows Rate Book entries as 'House and land, Cumberland, 950 acres', and 'Mansion, woolshed, etc. and 950 acres'. The other part of the property, some 500 acres was situated in the Shire of Bulla and was rated separately as land in Tullamarine.

Fisher was a prominent South Australian grazier who moved to Melbourne in 1865. In about 1871 he began to lease the 640 acre Oaklands [see Site Report BB/17] property near Bulla, continuing to lease this land for some twenty years, and as described above, in December 1873, he purchased Woodlands and Cumberland. At some stage, he also purchased a property at Colac. He used these properties to breed from imported Lincoln sheep and stud Shorthorns and he was to later become one of the biggest pastoralists in Australia.

In 1886, Fisher sold both properties to a land development syndicate but by March 1889 sole ownership of the Cumberland property had been transferred to William Henry Croker. Croker had also become the sole owner of Woodlands. Croker was born in Canada, and was considered by 1892 to be 'one of the two leading maritime lawyers in the colony'. During his ownership of both properties, Croker was prominent in Oaklands Hunt Club activities, and Cumberland often featured as the starting or finishing point for Point to Point Steeplechases and Hunt meets. As well as being a founder and member of the Oaklands Hunt Club and president for fifteen years, Croker was also a member of the Victoria Racing Club Committee from 1888.

In the early 1890s Croker leased his Cumberland property to a Robert Carstairs Bell, and then to Alexander McCracken from the mid-1890s. McCracken, a large brewer (he sold out to Carlton and United Breweries), owned the North Park mansion on Woodland Street, Essendon. The McCrackens used Cumberland as a 'country residence', installing a caretaker who lived there and looked after the stock. Cumberland was used to spell horses, ponies and cows from

15 PROV, VPRS28/P1, Unit 6, Record 239 of Series 3 - Probate Papers for George Coghill.
16 Isaac Batey, 'The Pioneers of the Sunbury District', manuscript dated 1907 held in Box 26/2 at the La Trobe Library Manuscript Collection, State Library of Victoria, p.363.
17 PROV, VPRS 7959 P1, Unit 1 - Rate Books for the Broadmeadows District Road Board, 1863-1870.
18 Lennon, op.cit., p.51.
19 This information and all of the ownership and biographical information following, unless specified, is from Lennon, op.cit., passim.
20 Table Talk, 25 March 1892, p.4.
North Park. McCracken also stocked sheep for their meat, and kept 'hunters' for use with the Oaklands Hunt Club.

Like Croker, McCracken was also prominent in racing circles. He was an inaugural member of the Oaklands Hunt Club, a successful participant (winning the 1906 Point to Point steeplechase), and a generous and popular member. *Cumberland* was often used as the venue for meetings of the Hunt Club, and by the early 1900s it had become something of a tradition for the McCrackens to entertain the Hunt Club members after the opening meeting for the season. McCracken owned some successful racing horses, and was a President of the Victoria Racing Club. He was also a member and benefactor of many other clubs and associations, including the Royal Agricultural Society (President 1909-1915), Essendon Football Club (founding secretary, and President), the Victorian Football League (first President, 1897-1915) and many other professional, sporting and community organisations.21

After Alexander McCracken's death in 1916, *Cumberland* was leased to a Mr Ingles, a grazier, until 1920. It was then rented to the Johnston family from the neighbouring property *Glendewar*, once located on the south side of the Moonee Ponds Creek. John Johnston moved into the homestead with his wife and seven children and they stayed there until 1934. He ran sheep on the property, which also included 520 acres of *Woodlands*, and grew oats. They also cultivated two vegetable gardens. One was located behind the wool sheds and was watered by a siphon pump from an underground beehive well; the other was near a large dam. The Johnstons also built a garage and tennis court immediately behind the kitchen wing.

The Johnstons moved back to *Glendewar* in 1934 and the *Cumberland* homestead fell empty. In 1939 a Frank McClelland Mitchell became the lessee of all the land at *Cumberland* until he purchased the entire 1896 acres in 1945. An old aunt of the Mitchells and her son lived at the house for some time but the buildings had begun to fall into disrepair after the Johnstons left. Local residents who were children in the 1940s recall it as 'the ghost house' and over the years it declined into its present ruinous state; the dressed bluestone was probably moved and reused elsewhere.

Mitchell died soon after acquiring the property and, in September 1949, it passed to his widow, Violet Irene Mitchell. She granted quarrying rights to Bayview Quarries P/L in December 1956. Mrs Mitchell died in April 1958 and her executors sold the property to Stanhill Development P/L in March 1863. By August, Stanhill was in liquidation and the land was transferred to Factors (Victoria) P/L. In 1980, Factors sold the land to the State Government and it was included in the Gellibrand Hill Regional Park.

Recommendations:

The *Cumberland* ruin, and the remnants of its early garden plantings, is recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay of the Hume Planning Scheme.

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