

## Statement of Significance

### Itinerant Potato Diggers' Huts in the Trentham and Little Hampton District

**Heritage Place:** Itinerant Potato Diggers' Huts  
in the Trentham and Little Hampton District

**Planning Scheme Ref no:** HO 988



Spud Hut 11, 40 Breheny Lane, Trentham



Spud Hut 1, 98 Huttons Lane, Little Hampton



Spud Hut 17, 119 Huttons Lane, Little Hampton



Spud Hut 21a, 70 Rothes Road, Little Hampton



Spud Hut 21b, 70 Rothes Road, Little Hampton



Spud Hut 37, 2177 Trentham Falls Rd, Trentham

### What is significant?

The following features contribute to the significance of the place:

#### Address

Spud Hut 11: Property No 200765 at 40 Breheny Lane, Trentham

Spud Hut 15: Property No 14641 at 98 Huttons Lane, Little Hampton

Spud Hut 17: Property No 14643 at 119 Huttons Lane, Little Hampton

Spud Huts 21 a and b: Property No 14837 at 70 Rothes Road, Little Hampton

Spud Hut 37: Property No 20257, 2177 Trentham Falls Road, Trentham

The Trentham District was one of the highest producing late potato farming areas of Victoria during the first half of the 20th century. Victoria was the top potato producing state in Australia until the mid 20th century. The principal later potato harvesting districts were Ballarat, extending from

Warrenheip, Bungaree, Dean, Newlyn, Daylesford and Trentham and across to Woodend, Lancefield and Hornsey; in Gippsland considerable acres were grown in Koo-wee-rup Swamp district and further south at Fish Creek.

The potato farms and potato harvest defined the cultural life of Trentham for over a hundred years from the first crops in 1860s to the late 1970 when there were still a hundred potato farmers still in business. The potato digger huts, or spud huts, are generic, basic and became an iconic marker across the local rural landscape. Each potato farmer in the district had one or two potato huts for their itinerant agricultural workers. It is the typology of the standard potato hut which defines the 20th century potato farming system in the Trentham region.

Each hut consisted of a single room with one window and a fireplace with external chimney and sometimes a firebox outside. The size was constant about 3 metres by 2 metres, corrugated metal single ridge roof, timber structural frame, stud and braced walls, lined externally with timber weatherboards as well as tongue and groove timber lining interior walls, floors and ceilings. All unpainted timber finishes as illustrated by the examples of Spud Huts 11, 17, 21a and b and 37).

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### How is it significant?

The Potato Huts have cultural heritage significance as a serial group for historic, rarity and representative values at a local level and for their potential to yield further information.

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### Why is it significant?

The Potato Huts (spud huts) have historical significance for their associations with itinerant potato diggers, seasonal agricultural workers, who were employed by local Trentham potato farmers to help with hand harvesting the potato crop from April to September each year over a period of nearly a hundred years from the late 19th century to the late 20th century. (Criterion A)

The Potato Huts (spud huts) have rarity value as they were locally designed and adapted to the six month winter harvest of the Trentham potato, at a time when Trentham was one of the main producers of quality late potatoes in Victoria. When this farming system changed during the late 20th century and early 21st century many of the itinerant workers remained living in the huts on the farms until the end of their lives. Unusually, the Potato Huts are associated with a single moveable item, which was always provided in each of the huts, a single metal or handmade bed. Many remain insitu. (Criterion B)

The Potato Huts (spud huts) have high representative value as a vernacular rural building type that was specifically designed to accommodate a single itinerant worker during the cold Trentham winters. They were constructed by the farmers from timber and later metal with the potential to be portable and left on the fields during harvest. (Criterion D)

There is a high potential for the building structures to yield further information about the story of itinerant agricultural workers in the district. (Criterion C)

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### Serial Listing

**Spud Hut 11,**  
40 Breheny Lane, Trentham

- Spud Hut No 11 located close to McAulay Lane, off Rothes Road, Little Hampton.
- Property owners John Rothe, John Rothe jnr, Dave and Neill Rothe, and Ray Bruton.
- The extended Rothe family were responsible for the construction of many timber and metal mobile Spud Huts in

the district as was RC Bruton. This is a typical design, rectangular in form, 3 metres by 2 metres, with pitch gable roof, corrugated metal exterior, brick external chimney adjacent the front entrance door, a single timber frame louvered glass window on one side and a single metal bed inside the timber lined interior.

<b>Spud Hut 15,</b> 98 Huttons Lane, Little Hampton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spud Hut No 15 located off Hutton Lane, off Rothes Road, Little Hampton.</li> <li>• Property owner, Jim Minifie and possibly Jack Talbot, also an itinerant digger, shearer and fencer and Returned Soldier. Jack Talbot sold his land to George Bruton and built this larger spud hut on the opposite side of the road.</li> <li>• The building is typical, rectangular in form with pitch gable roof, external chimney adjacent the front entrance door. There was a kitchen and verandah addition for Jack Talbot's bride that did not eventuate. This is a typical example that demonstrates in physical form the complexity of social relationships between diggers and farmers at the time.</li> </ul>
<b>Spud Hut 17,</b> 119 Huttons Lane, Little Hampton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spud Hut No 17 off Hutton Lane, off Rothes Road, Little Hampton.</li> <li>• The standard size design was built by the diggers themselves, Pat, Des and Kevin Curran, brothers.</li> <li>• The rectangular form with low pitch gable roof, brick external chimney with adjacent front entrance door and a single timber frame double hung glass window on one side. Internally lined with tongue and groove lining boards and timber floors.</li> <li>• Property owners Jack Talbot, George and Freda Bruton, Freda Lobb and Terry Clare. Itinerant Potato Diggers, Pat, Des and Kevin Curran.</li> </ul>
<b>Spud Hut 21a,</b> 70 Rothes Road, Little Hampton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spud Hut No 21a, along Rothes Road near the junction with Little Hampton Road.</li> <li>• Property owners were John Rothe and Jeffrey Thomas.</li> <li>• Two huts, one metal, shown below with a nearby detached toilet. It is believed that the timber hut was used as the paymaster's hut relocated from the Gambetti's goldmine in Hutton Lane in 1920.</li> <li>• Johnny Benson, an itinerant digger lived in the hut until the 1960 until he died.</li> </ul>
<b>Spud Hut 21 b,</b> 70 Rothes Road, Little Hampton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spud Hut No 21b, along Rothes Road near the junction with Little Hampton Road.</li> <li>• Property owners were John Rothe and Jeffrey Thomas.</li> <li>• Two huts, one metal, and the other timber shown above. The metal hut had a nearby detached toilet. The corrugated iron hut was erected in the 1948 to 1950. The later shed was built around the hut.</li> <li>• The metal spud hut was used by Jonny Benson, and later by other itinerant potato diggers.</li> </ul>
<b>Spud Hut 37,</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spud Hut No 37 off Falls Lane, off Trentham Road Trentham.</li> <li>• Property owners Frank Dwyer and Barry Hourigan.</li> </ul>

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2177 Trentham Falls Road,  
Trentham

- Standard size and design, rectangular in form with low pitch gable roof, brick external chimney with adjacent firebox adjacent the front entrance door and a single timber frame double hung glass window on one side. Internally lined with tongue and groove lining boards and timber floors.
- Itinerant Potato Diggers, George Grey.

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**Primary source**

Itinerant Potato Diggers' Huts in the Trentham and Little Hampton District. June 2020

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This document is an incorporated document in the Hepburn Planning Scheme pursuant to Section 6(2)(i) of the Planning and Environment Act 1987