

Maryborough Forestry District

Cooran Sawmill

Location

The sawmill shed and ancillary buildings are located on the western side of the Cooran-Traveston Road on the north edge of Cooran. GPS 26 deg 20 min 9 sec S, 152 deg 49 min 13 sec E.

Recommended Heritage Boundaries

The road alignment property boundary and the property boundaries of the land on which the former sawmill buildings stand.

History

Sawmilling at Cooran continued for about 70 years. Albert Doyle was recorded at Cooran 1907-10, and it may be the same mill site that successively operated as Renshaw and Loseby (1910-13), George Renshaw (1914-26) and from 1927 Straker and Company. Logs came first by teams and by motor from 1934 when the Strakers bought a Ford V8 2-ton truck and built their own jinker. This small unit was inadequate, especially in braking power. Cliff and Arthur Morton were some of the early operators. Jack and Jim Collette continued to use bullock and horse teams hauling from the Kin Kin area.

Arthur Straker began work in the mill in 1930 when the mill had few orders because of the depression. The sawmill was steam powered, with circular saws and five-foot gate vertical frame saw. Even in the 1930s there were still logs too large for the equipment which had to be trimmed manually to fit the saws. At its peak the mill employed 20 including four bush cutters. The mill was electrified but eventually closed in the late 1960s.¹

Site Description and Condition

The principal building, the sawmill shed, adjoins the roadway and its street alignment is dictated by the property boundary. The main floor has had the machinery removed and been converted into a second hand goods shop. Part of the ceiling had been lined at the time of inspection. The lower level, which only extends part of the building, was not available for inspection but is said to house some original machinery, apparently planing machinery. The mill boiler, engine, log carriage, breaking down saw and other sawbenches may all have been at the lower level. The adjoining

buildings, also converted to other generally retail uses, include the former office and garage. The former manager's house remains in use as a private residence.

Assessment of Significance

Sawmilling was for many years the principal industry of Cooran and Straker's mill is a well-developed example of the later period. The absence of machinery detracts from the significance of the site but the existence of a number of buildings in close proximity helps to demonstrate how a mature and more major sawmill operated. Many small mills did not have an office and the sawmill shed was made to serve all purposes. The site is significant as an example of sawmill building architecture, one of the moderately large sawmilling enterprises that were the mainstay of townships like Cooran (Category d).

Recommendations

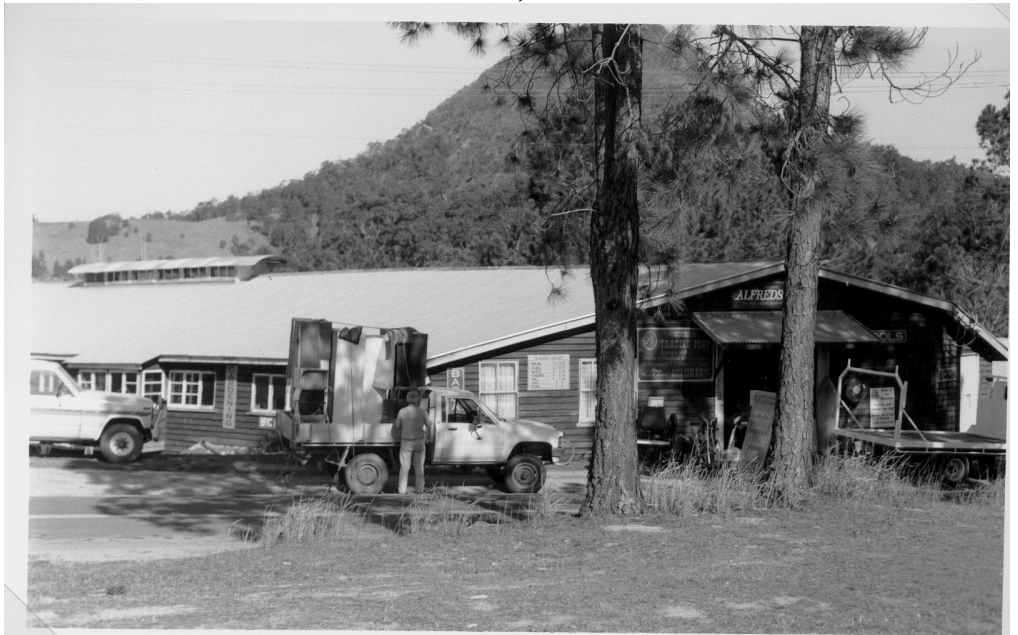
Investigate the whole area as a sawmilling site. As the machinery has been removed, the remaining heritage significance of the structures is not impaired by their present use. Interpretive signage would enable the public to understand the former role of the building. The area needs protection from the fire hazard of uncontrolled growth near the back of the main sawmill shed.

References

1. Martin Hirsch in *Gympie Times* 27 December 1996 p. 5.

Former Straker's Sawmill, Coran

General view of upper level of main sawmill shed



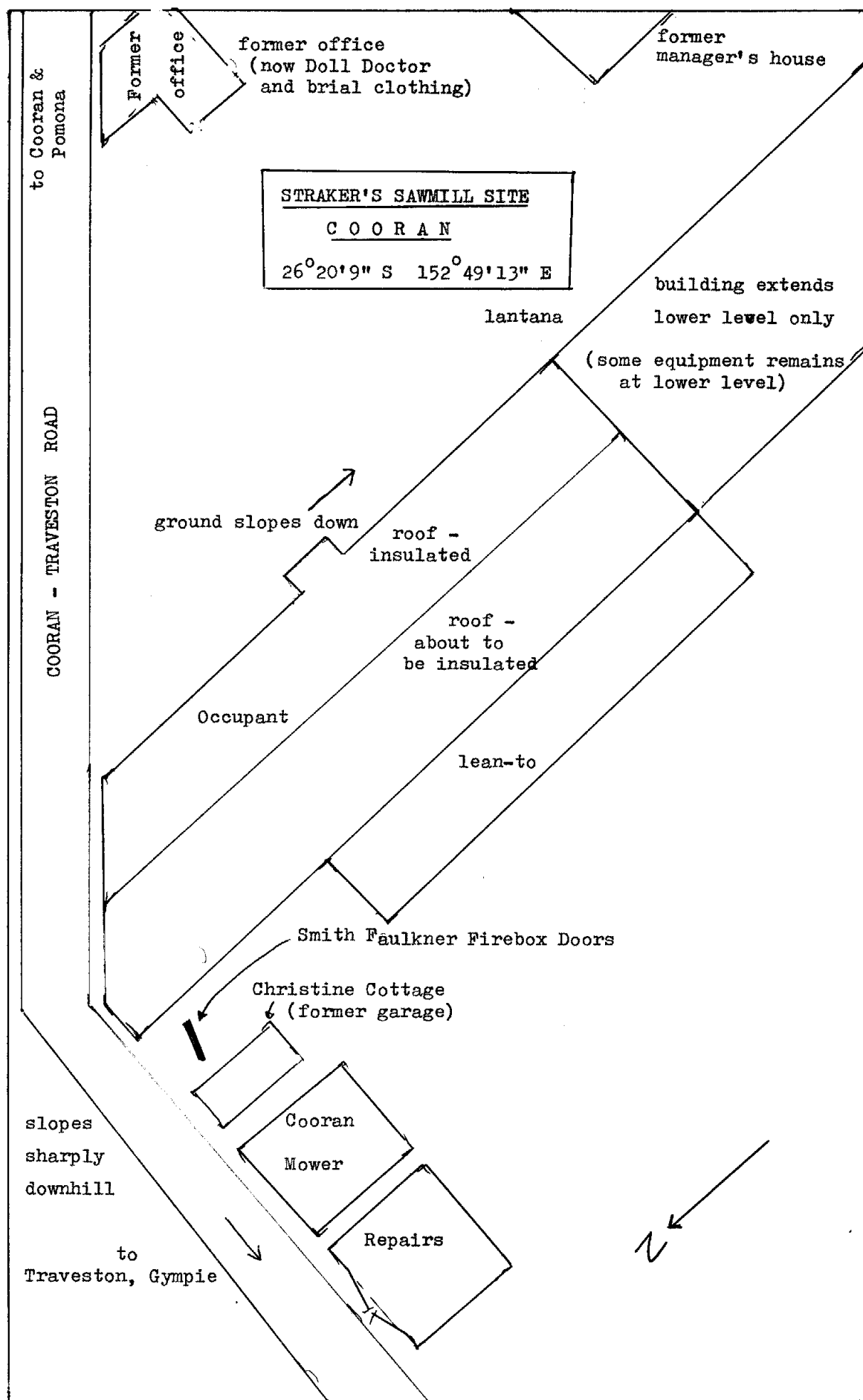
View of building now used as shop apparently former sawmill office



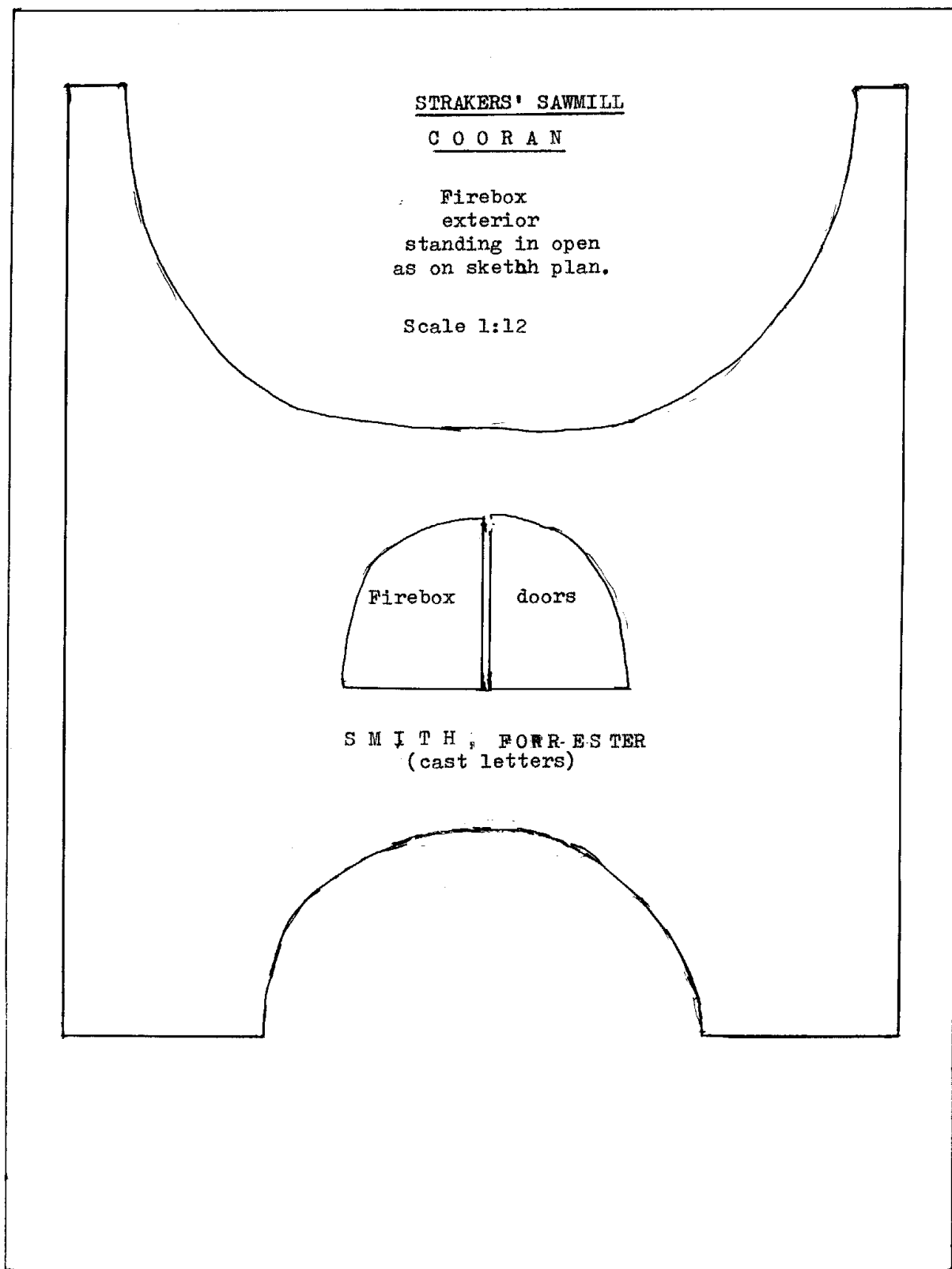
View of steel firebox front and doors made by Smith Faulkner



276



277



Dundathu Sawmill and Village

Location

The Dundathu sawmill was located by the Mary River. The site is approached via the Prawle Road a right turn off the Maryborough to Pialba Road and a further right turn onto the Dundathu Road through a gate and along that road to near the house of Mr E. Hansen, land-owner. GPS 25 deg 28 min 34 sec S 152 deg 44 min 40 sec E.

Recommended Heritage Boundaries

The recommended boundaries stretch from the middle of the river but other boundaries cannot be accurately recommended without archaeological investigation. The site was large, being a sawmill and village, and the visible remains few and scattered.

History

After William Pettigrew examined the Mary River valley for its timber, he purchased a farm near the Walliebum cotton plantation as a sawmill site in August 1862. He landed at what he named Dundathu and walked around the lagoon on 29 October 1862. Having decided on the best site, he marked it out on 4 November.¹

Pettigrew had already advertised for 50,000 bricks and soon had men at work at this rather isolated outpost; only three weeks after the site was marked out, his workmen were attacked and robbed by the Aborigines.²

The boilers were landed on 30 June 1863, the travelling crane in July and the saws were set to work on 22 August. The frame saw was started in late October and within a month the plant was breaking down 40 logs a day. Pettigrew advertised for contractors to supply the pine he required, some 450,000 super feet per month.³

William Sim, who emigrated from Scotland to Brisbane in 1854, was the son of a timber man and had worked in Pettigrew's first sawmill. He bought a quarter share in the Dundathu venture in 1871.⁴

Dundathu, being about eight miles from Maryborough, developed as a separate village. In mid 1864 there were a dozen cottages and sawn timber was being regularly shipped to Brisbane and to North Queensland. Until the Saltwater Creek bridge was completed in January 1865, Dundathu was difficult to access by road. A church (used as school house during the week) and residence for the teacher were provided by

Pettigrew and Sims in early 1866. A telegraph line was erected in 1876, the contract for its erection let to Pettigrew.⁵

Dundathu, treating 120,000 feet of pine per week, was a busy port. Schooners taking timber to markets throughout Australasia each carried a load often less than one of today's semi-trailers. The forty mill workers supported a population of 300.

The machinery, mostly English and Scottish, included three boilers (two flue boilers and one, more modern, with Galloway tubes). There were two vertical saws (one four-bladed), and overhead travelling crane running on transverse beams with two iron claws to move large timber to the travelling benches. The planing machines smoothed the pine, and cut tongue and groove as required. The steamer *Hercules* towed rafts of pine timber to Dundathu from Fraser Island and Tin Can Bay.⁶

Virtually all sawmills used rails for moving timber and holding it in position for sawing. Pettigrew refers to a railway into the planing machine in 1865 and in 1870 to the heavy wear of wooden rails, apparently referring to Dundathu. Pettigrew in a paper to the Queensland Philosophical Society on 6 October 1871 told of his experience with wooden rails which had then been in use at Dundathu for seven years. Pettigrew recorded that there were two turntables at Dundathu, the one next to the lagoon measuring 4 feet 10 inches in diameter and the other 5 feet 1 inch.⁷

A new chimney was built at Dundathu in 1875.⁸ However, Dundathu appears not to have been modernised and in 1882 was said to be far behind the rebuilt Wilson Hart mill. The demise of Dundathu came on Christmas Day in 1893. The fire was first noticed in the mill itself at 4pm. Nothing was left of the mill but a mass of twisted machinery under heaps of ashes and a few charred posts. Pettigrew inspected the site on 29 December and noted that the rail trucks were destroyed and the wheels cracked or broken by the heat. Another fire in 1895 burnt some of the vacant houses.⁹ The site is now owned by E.A. (Eddie) and E.B. Hansen.

Site Description and Condition

The only remains above ground discovered or known to the land owner comprise a post and a small boiler. On the surface there are shallow drains, and low mounds of bricks and scattered bricks, a log culvert which may post-date the sawmill and considerable evidence of disturbance

stretching from the river to the swamp or lagoon which provided the water supply for Dundathu.

Assessment of Significance

Dundathu was the first major sawmill in the Maryborough district, located by the river to facilitate both the rafting of logs and export of sawn timber as Maryborough became the main supplier to northern Queensland. The site is strongly associated with the Pettigrew and Sim families as well as being important in the history of the Maryborough district. The site thus has significance under Criterion (a), and archaeological study could yield information about the nature of the sawmill and village that would contribute to the understanding of Queensland history (criterion c). It is also strongly linked to two important families important in the development of Queensland (criterion h).

Recommendations

An archaeological study is recommended to delineate heritage boundaries and provide sound assessment of the heritage criteria. Mrs Elaine Brown is currently writing a PhD history on the subject of Pettigrew and it is recommended that she be contacted in the matter of research and advice on heritage criteria.

References

1. MC 28 August 1862; William Pettigrew Diary 1862.
2. BC 10 October 1862; MC 27 November 1862.
3. Pettigrew Diary; MC 3 December 1863.
4. * *River of Dreams* pp. 353-6; Pettigrew Diary 1871.
5. MC 19 May 1864 and shipping entries in MC; MC 31 December 1864, 17 January 1866, 20 July 1876.
6. Loyau, p. 347.
7. Pettigrew Diary 4 August 1870; Tramway Select Committee, Queensland Parliament, *Votes and Proceedings* 1874 Vol. 2 p. 787; Pettigrew Diary 19 July 1875.
8. MC 30 October 1875.
9. *Mackay Mercury* 12 July 1882; MC 27 December 1893; Pettigrew Diary; MC 26, 27 August 1895.

Dundathu Sawmill Site

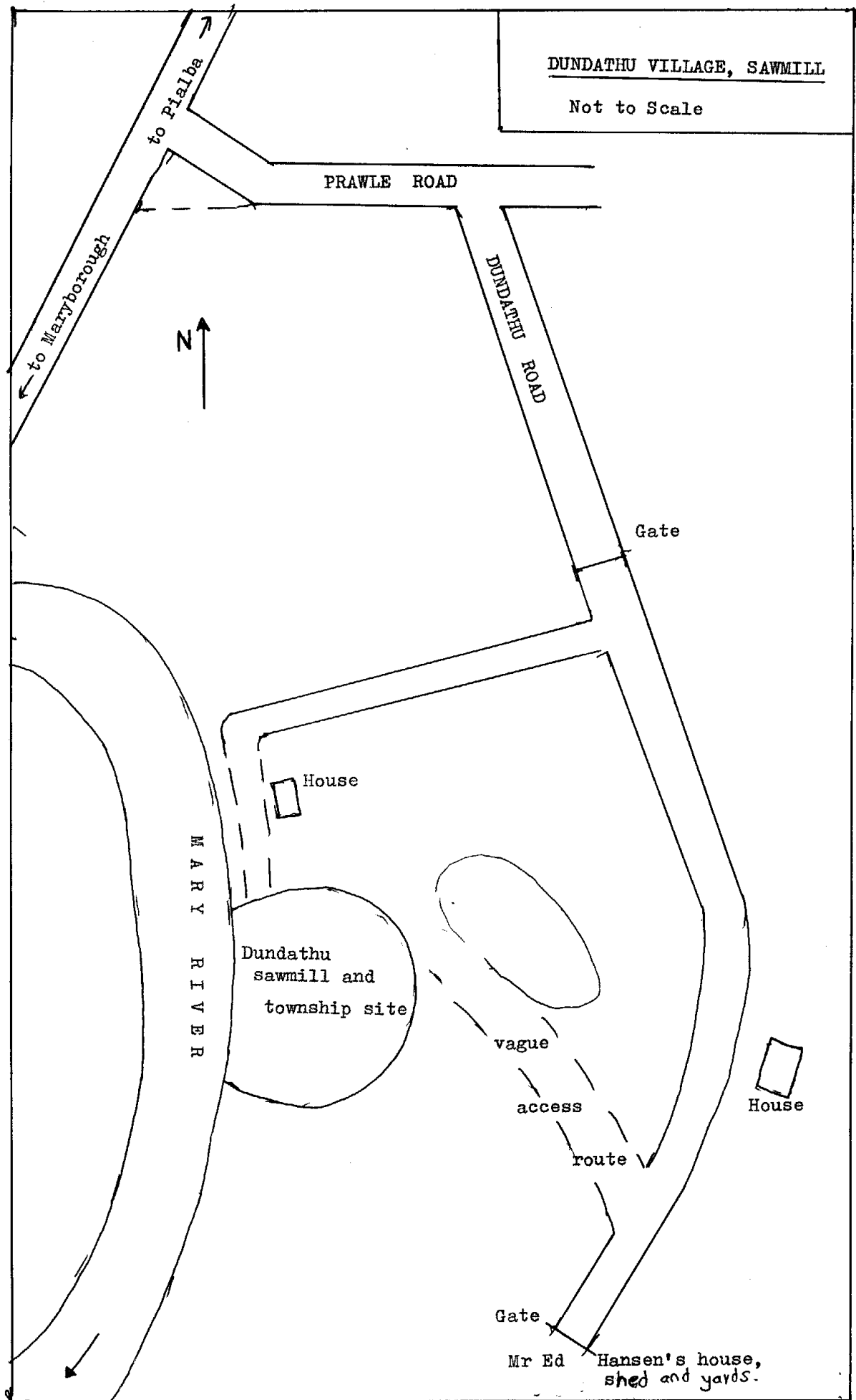


View of post with bolt protruding



View of remains of small boiler

281



282

