

Elgin Vale Sawmill

Location

At the end of a short access road across the creek from the intersection of the Manumbar-Nanango Road and the Goomeri-Elgin Vale Road. GPS 26 deg 26 min 38 sec S 152 deg 11 min 20 sec E.

Recommended Heritage Boundaries

Minimum boundaries recommended are the creek, the access road, and a line 10 metres from the southern side of the sawmill and 10 metres from and parallel to the eastern side of the traverser beside the sawmill. The boundaries could be extended to include the houses on the site and CWA ex-school on the opposite side of the creek to retain the whole site.

History

Timber getters quickly followed the railway. The first sawmill was established by Ross and Company at Elgin Vale on Moonda Waamba Creek in Water Reserve 81 in 1908. Ross and Company shifted to Goomeri, and enlarged the mill, and rebuilt it after it burnt down. Ross operated the mill until he died in 1940. The mill still operated as Ross and Company and closed in 1958.¹ Fraser Wright (1916-29), Brett Limited (1923-41, possibly the Manumbar Mill) and Thomas H. Spencer (1941-45) are also listed at Goomeri.

As well as William Ross, noted at Elgin Vale in 1914, Fraser Wright was recorded as Elgin Vale 1914-15. T.H. Spencer transferred a mill to Elgin Vale about 1927, at Scrubby Paddock.¹⁰ Although closed for some years in the depression, it reopened and supported a small township with cottages, boarding house and school. The engine came from T. Robinson and Son, England with a smaller engine for planing.

The mill burnt down in 1943 and was rebuilt in 1945 with one boiler. It was sold to Wilson Hart of Maryborough in 1946. They appointed Roy Veritz as manager, other managers being G. Risk, R. Davies and Dick Collard. In later years the managers also acted as foremen and benchmen.

Frank Coleman of Goomeri was one of the carriers taking sawn timber by truck to Goomeri Railway Station, usually railed to Maryborough. After one bad fire at Maryborough, Wilson Hart relocated its staff to Elgin Vale, augmenting the 20 men

normally at work, and the mill worked three shifts a day.

Electricity did not reach Elgin Vale until 1965 and steam operation continued with electricity only used for lighting. Steam operation continued until the April 1987 close down, the result of a building downturn and depletion of local supplies. The school, closed in 1977, is now a QCWA rest room. Bob Mercer managed the mill in the latter years. It was handed over jointly to Kilkivan Shire Councils as a National Trust building and tourist attraction. The last known firing of the boiler was in 1991 for a demonstration run.²

Elgin Vale was in 1950 one of the states largest sawmills.³ [The appellation as Coffee Pot Mill is not historically sound.]

Site Description and Condition

Elgin Vale is remarkable as a complete sawmill reflecting mid 20th century sawmilling practice, being steam powered and using traditional methods and technology. Its remoteness resulted in the continuation of steam operation when most mills had been electrified. By the time power came, it was only used for lighting as the mill was evidently not considered worth the investment in modernisation given its location.

Having been closed now for several years, maintenance is needed to ensure that the mill remains in operating condition. The mill has also been modified for the safety of people watching sawmilling demonstrations.

Assessment of Significance

The preservation of a sawmill in operating condition, virtually unchanged from its working state, is a rarity. It ranks with places such as the Blackall Wool Scour as deserving special consideration to ensure it remains to inform present generations of what was normal sawmilling practice until the mid 20th century. It is significant for its rarity (Criterion b), to my knowledge the only sawmill of moderate size operated by steam and in working order. It is important for demonstrating the major features of sawmilling in Queensland from the late 1800s to the mid 1950s (Criterion d). To a degree it has significance for its association with the now defunct Maryborough firm of Wilson Hart (Criterion h) but that firm's association with the mill is long after the founders of the firm had retired.

Recommendations

A program of regular maintenance to halt the decay and ensure that the boiler and engine remain in safe working order as long as is feasible. The alterations to the sawmill to permit safe public access should be clearly distinguished from the sawmill proper. The major difficulty with appreciation of the mill is its isolation from normal tourist routes. Signs would assist the casual visitor to the site. More supervision would be needed to prevent theft and vandalism once the site becomes better known. The Kilkivan Shire Council has a difficult but important role as caretaker and trustee of the site.

References

1. Logan, pp. 192, 196.
2. Logan, pp. 196-7; *South Burnett Times* 11 June 1996 p. 2.
3. Murphy and Easton, p. 326.

Elgin Vale Sawmill

General view of sawmill from southern side showing log ramp



General view of sawmill from east with office at left and traverser in front



View of pulleys and belts driving saw bench and carriage

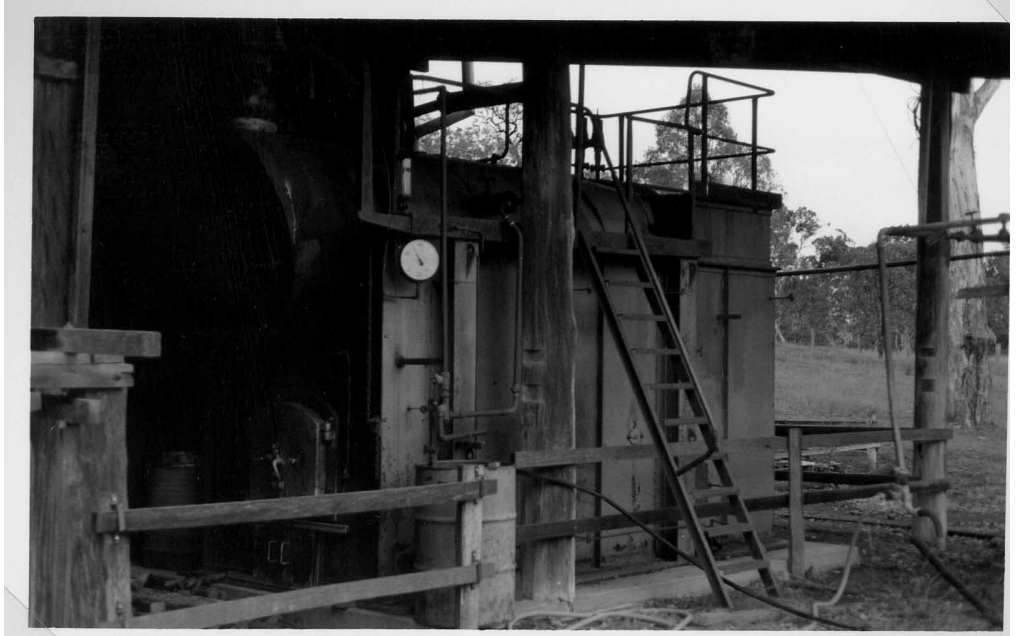


Elgin Vale Sawmill

View of finishing
section of sawmill
from north east
showing
tramways



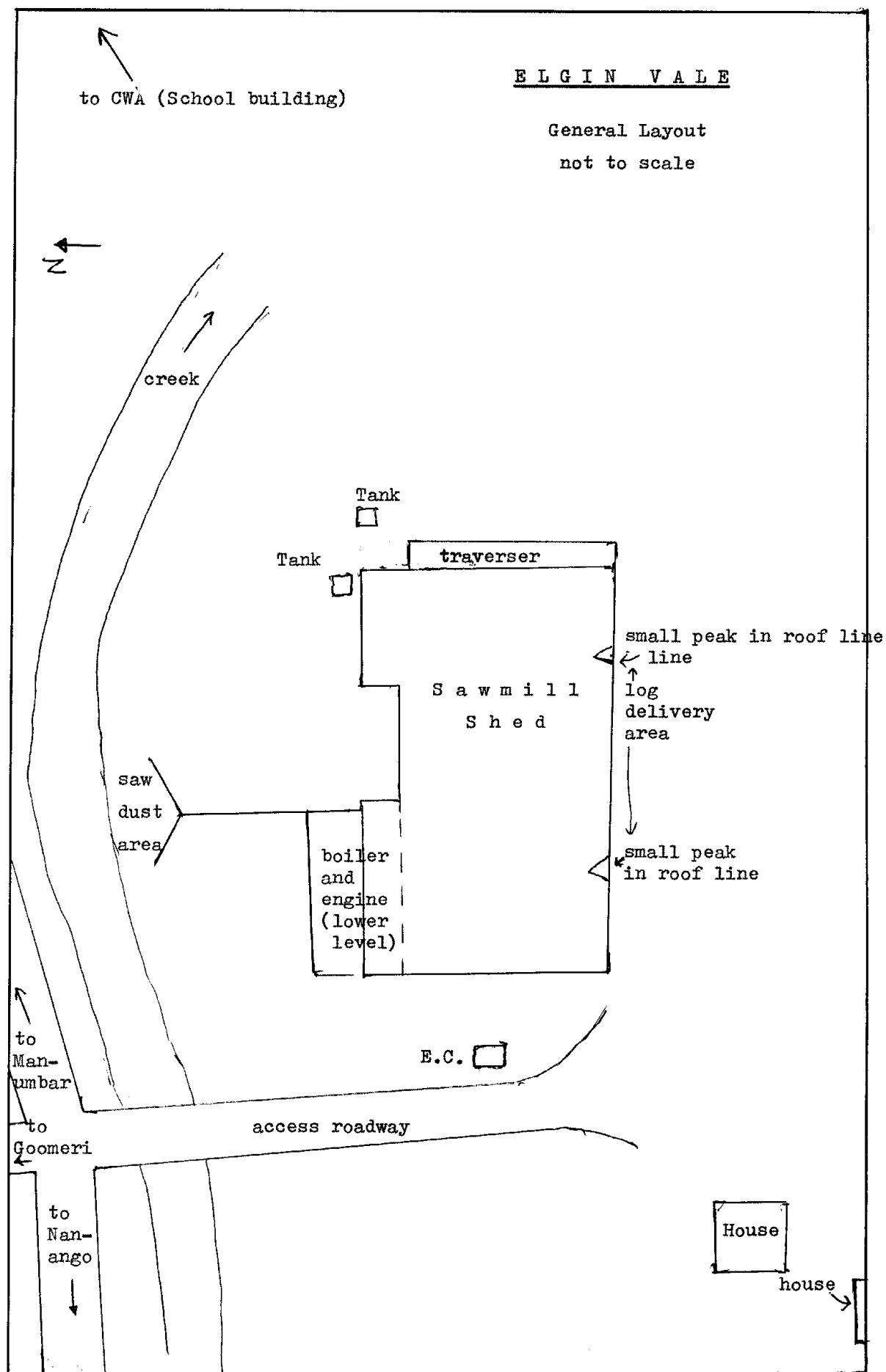
View of boiler
and furnace with
pressure gauge



View of steam
engine used to
power sawmill



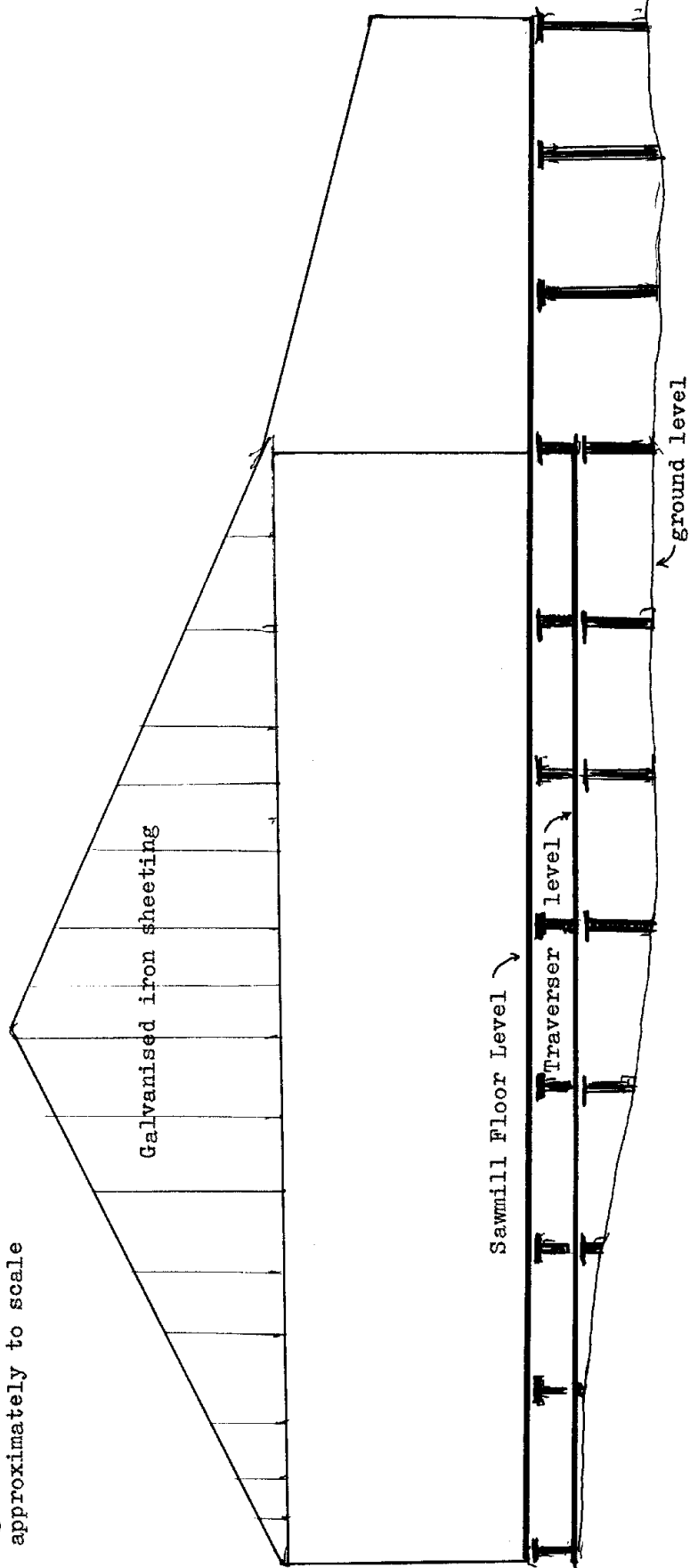
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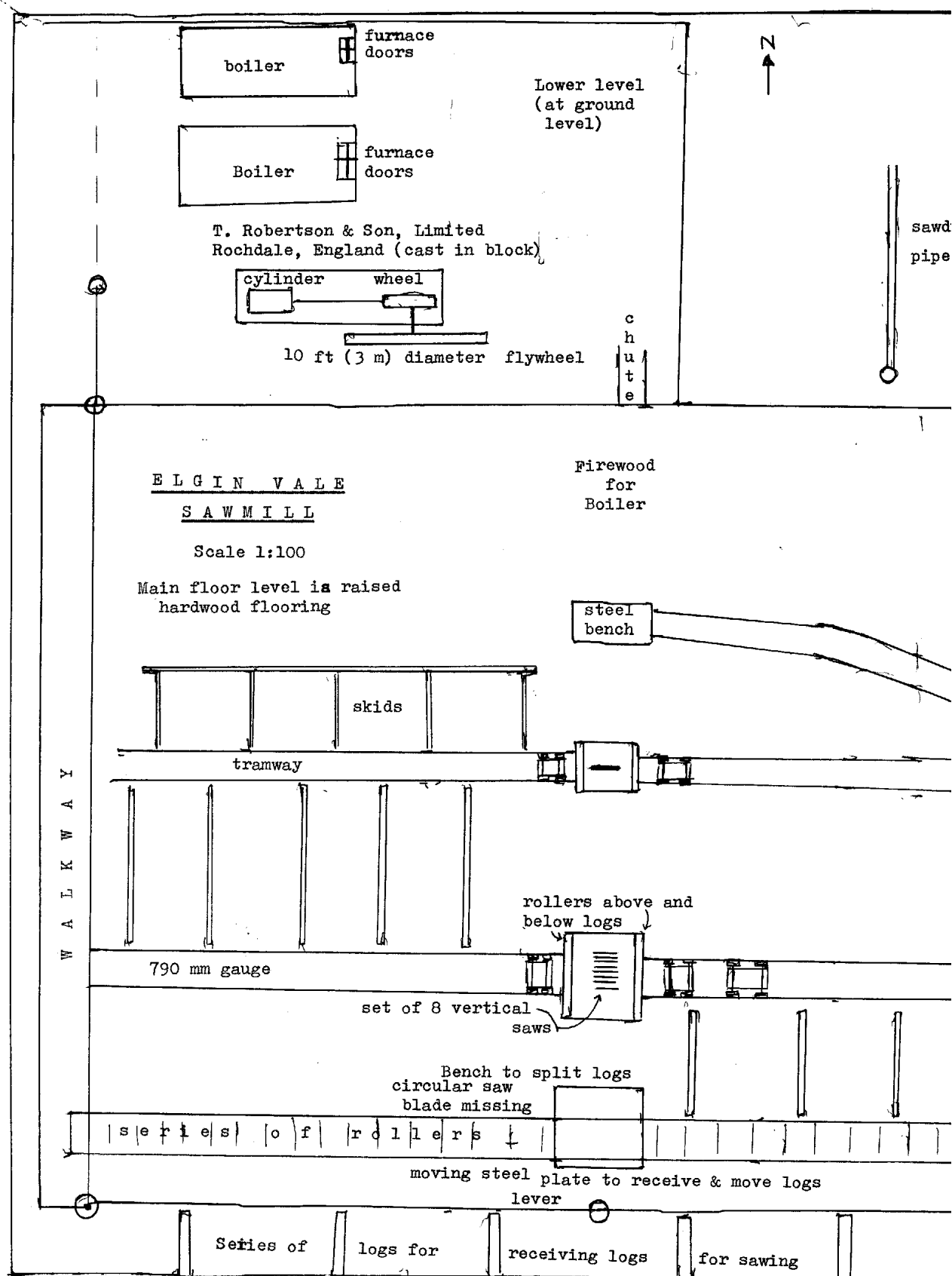


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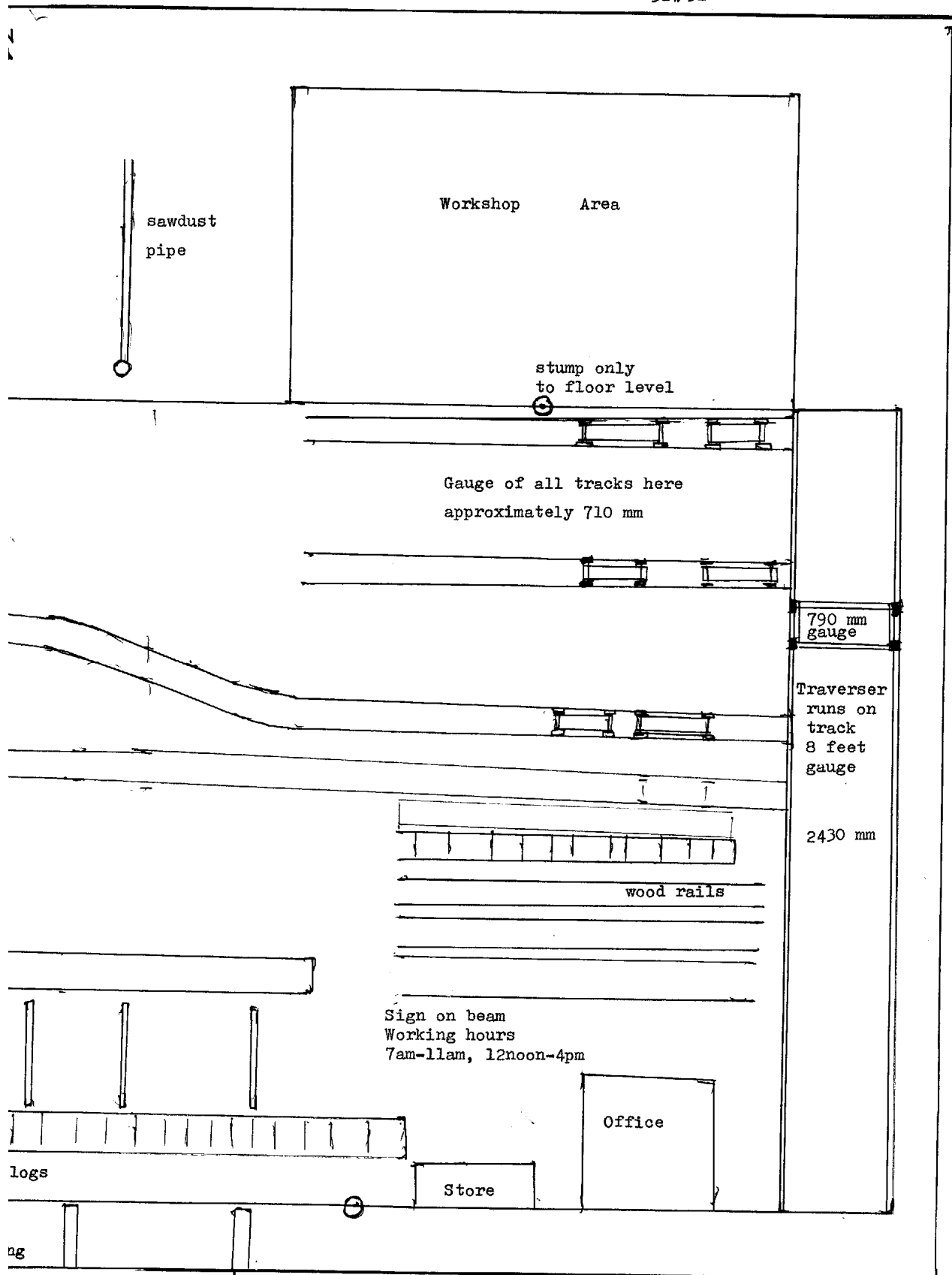
ELGIN VALE SAWMILLEnd View

Heights above floor level only
approximately to scale





327/328



Nanango Sawmill

Location

Opposite the western end of Hay Street, Nanango.
GPS 26 deg 40 min 48 sec S, 152 deg 0 min 10 sec E.

Recommended Heritage Boundaries

The fence line along the road on the eastern side of the property, the drain leading from Hay Street to the lagoon, and a line parallel to Hay Street 10 metres south of the southern extremity of the kiln structure. These boundaries may need to be refined.

History

Nanango was a timber town from its early years but had only small local markets until completion of the railway via Kilkivan in November 1911. Licences were issued for timber cutters in 1864. Murphy and Easton credit John Heiner as owning the first sawmill in Nanango, entirely hand operated, and comment that it started in 1901 in Fitzroy Street.¹

There was, however, a steam sawmill as early as 1878, the Queensland Times recording that R. Hendall's steam sawmill had resumed work in March 1878 after having been out of use for some time. A sawmill plant passed through Nanango in 1891, hauled up the range by 16 bullocks with T. Smith in charge; its destination was not stated.² Pugh records James Miller at Nanango from 1887 to 1891 and John Heiner as proprietor from 1892. H. Parson is listed in the Queensland Post Office Directory from 1900 and I. Fletcher from 1902 to 1905.

Watt, Muller and Company, later The Timber Corporation started its mill in 1908, managed by George Gordon Watt, experienced in timber, having managed sawmills at Palen Creek, Fernvale and Dundas. The mill, on a hill on the south-eastern side of the town, initially used steam traction engines to take sawn timber to the Kingaroy railhead. After the extension of the railway to Nanango, the mill was moved to the flat beside Horse creek just beyond the railway station. It was served by a siding built off the forkline in 1912. The mill was a large one, employing a maximum of 150 men.³

After Muller sold his share in Watt, Muller and Company to local interests, the Timber Corporation was formed with headquarters in

Brisbane. T.F. Moxton and later R.D. Frew were managing directors. Watt sold out in 1912, managing mills at Targinnie, Bunya Mountains and then joined Hancock and Gore in 1917.

The Nanango mill was burnt down in 1925 and rebuilt, with G.G. Watt supervising the installation of Robinson bandsaw and 'mule driver'. Timber Corporation sold the mill to Hancock and Gore in 1928 and Watt returned to Nanango as manager and later retired. His son George Alexander Watt continued in his father's trade, managing at Simsville near Stroud, NSW and at Louisavale, Monsildale and then Nanango for 27 years where he too retired. He had wanted to study medicine and in caring for his workmen gained a reputation as first-aid expert and for professional splints. He was prominent in Nanango affairs. Both Watts descended from Alexander Watt whose sons were sawmillers on the Coomera River.⁴ The mill was a major enterprise and operated until around 1970.

Site Description and Condition

The site when inspected had recently been burnt but it was obvious that basically only concrete and steel remains had marked the site for some years.

A number of substantial concrete remains marked the site. In the absence of plans and the removal of all machinery, and above ground structures except the kiln, the remains have not been identified. The central area which probably marks the sawmill site is in the most disturbed condition and without plans provides little evidence of the enterprise.

The concrete kiln is the most intact structure although only part of the hinges remains to indicate the door used to retain heat within the kiln. Kiln drying was very important in enhancing the marketability of hardwood species and the remains show a relatively early stage in kiln construction.

Assessment of Significance

The sawmill was a major enterprise, important to the economic life of the district for a substantial period and a principal source of rail revenue. The site was chosen to provide convenient rail access. Being located at the rail head, timber was brought from a wide radius. Although railings of timber were heaviest in the first few years after the railway opened, the sawmill was a major industry in the town and important in its development. The timber industry was a major factor in construction and prosperity of the railway and preparing the way for agriculture on cleared land, particularly to the north. The eventual closure of the mill

reflected evolving pattern of fewer larger and modern mills replacing even quite substantial sawmills. When rail transport was neither essential nor mandatory, the mill used solely road transport but lack of close resource gave the mill no particular advantage for survival.

The site is important in demonstration the evolution of Queensland history (criterion a). The kiln may be a rare surviving example of an early kiln (criterion b).

Recommendations

As the site is largely a ruin, the main emphasis is recommended on the kiln and the more intact remains of foundations, with suitable interpretative signs which might include photographs on metal and information on the layout and structure of the sawmill. The site could be made largely into parkland or other suitable use.

References

1. A/26772, QSA; Murphy and Easton p. 70.
2. *Queensland Times* 21 March 1878, 22 October 1891.
3. Murphy and Easton p.70, 97; R. Milne, "Rails to Nanango", Australian Railway Historical Society *Bulletin*, May 1993 pp. 116-8, 125-31.
4. David C. Jones, p. 76.

Nanango - Timber Corporation Sawmill

View of large concrete structures near road on east side of complex

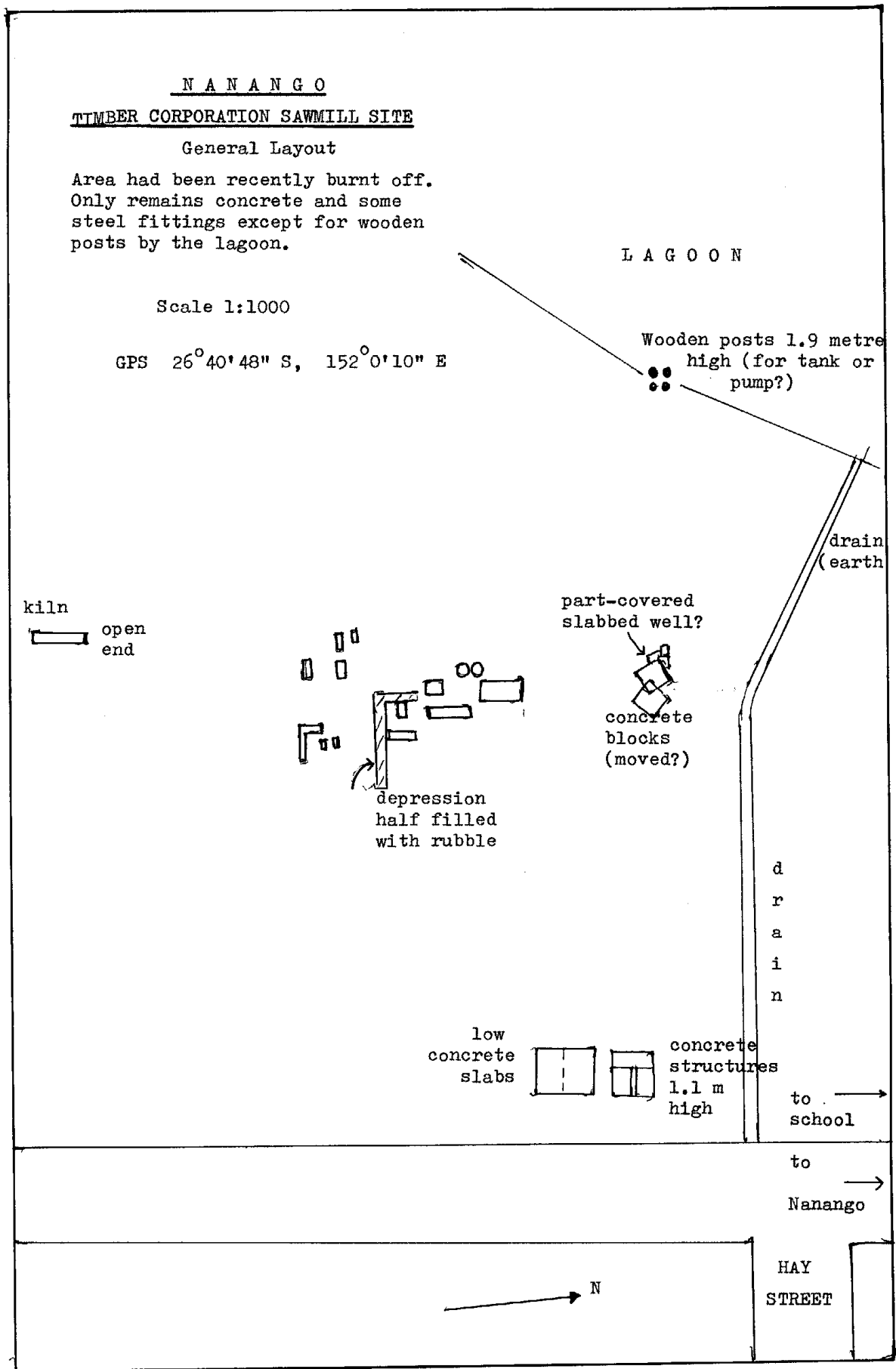


General view of remaining concrete structures in central area with kiln in background



View of concrete structure presumed used for drying sawn timber





333

