Tasmanian Heritage Register Datasheet

Tasmanian Heritage Council

134 Macquarie Street (GPO Box 618)
Hobart Tasmania 7001
Phone: 1300 850 332 (local call cost)
Email: enquiries@heritage.tas.gov.au
Web: www.heritage.tas.gov.au

Name: **Carlton Post Office**
Status: Permanently Registered
Tier:

THR ID Number: **12155**
Municipality: Sorell Council
Boundary: CPR11681

Location Addresses
640 CARLTON RIVER RD, CARLTON RIVER 7173 TAS

Title References
146709/1

Property Id
2695643

Carlton Post Office
NRE 2026

Eastern elevation, sandstone wall and fireplaces
NRE 2026

Southern elevation showing later addition to south-east corner
NRE 2026

Carlton River (southern boundary) with remains of a jetty
NRE 2026

Caricature sketches done by Captain Nicholas on internal wall
NRE 2026

Main room with sandstone wall and fireplace
NRE 2026

View through to western addition from main room
NRE 2026

Exposed roof structure and remaining shingles in centre room
NRE 2026

Carlton Post Office at Christmas, 25 December 1929 taken by Richard C Harvey
State Library & Archives of Tasmania NS1029-1-129

Carlton Post Office c.1966 taken by Ralph Wishaw
State Library & Archives of Tasmania NS165-1-86

Carlton Post Office
NRE 2007

Carlton Post Office
NRE 2009

Statement of Significance: (non-statutory summary)

Carlton Post Office demonstrates the importance of postal and telegraphic services as the principal means of communication during the 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly in rural and remote areas. During the mid to late 19th century and into the 20th century, post offices provided respectable employment for women. Carlton Post Office is an early example of a remote post office that functioned as a residence and commercial premises. Carlton Post Office is one of the oldest surviving vernacular cottages in Tasmania. Carlton Post Office is a rare example of an early 19th century timber slab cottage and a remote post office. Carlton Post Office has high archaeological potential, the building may contain underfloor artefact deposits, and exterior spaces, including the jetty and shoreline of the Carlton River, may contain subsurface archaeological features and deposits providing evidence of past postal, commercial and residential uses of the site. The caricature sketches on the plasterwork and timber panelling in the southern addition done by last postmaster, Captain Ken Nicholson, are an unusual and creative remnant of the past uses and occupants of the building.

Why is it significant?:

The Heritage Council may enter a place in the Heritage Register if it meets one or more of the following criteria from the Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995:

a) The place is important to the course or pattern of Tasmania's history.

Carlton Post Office demonstrates the importance of postal and telegraphic services as the principal means of communication during the 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly in rural and remote areas. During the mid to late 19th century and into the 20th century, post offices provided respectable employment for women.

b) The place possesses uncommon or rare aspects of Tasmania's history.

Carlton Post Office is one of the oldest surviving vernacular cottages in Tasmania, being a rare example of an early 19th century timber slab cottage. It is a rare example of surviving early 19th century timber post office in remote Van Diemen's Land.

c) The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Tasmania's history.

Carlton Post Office has the potential to yield information that will contribute to a greater understanding of the pattern of development of Carlton and Sorell during the early 19th century. Carlton Post Office has high archaeological potential, the building may contain underfloor artefact deposits, and exterior spaces, including the jetty and shoreline of the Carlton River, may contain subsurface archaeological features and deposits providing evidence of past postal, commercial and residential uses of the site.

d) The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of place in Tasmania's history.

Carlton Post Office is an early example of a remote post office that functioned as a residence and commercial premises.

e) The place is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement.

The caricature sketches on the plasterwork and timber panelling in the southern addition done by last postmaster, Captain Ken Nicholson, are an unusual and creative remnant of the past uses and occupants of the building.

f) The place has a strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social or spiritual reasons.

No Data Recorded

g) The place has a special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Tasmania's history.

No Data Recorded

h) The place is important in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

No Data Recorded

Heritage approval is required for work that will result in changes to the nature or appearance of the fabric of a Heritage place, both internal and external.
Please refer to the Heritage Council's Works Guidelines (www.heritage.tas.gov.au) for information about the level of approval required and appropriate outcomes.
Heritage Advisors are also available to answer questions and provide guidance on enquiries@heritage.tas.gov.au or Tel 1300850332

This data sheet is intended to provide sufficient information and justification for listing the place on the Heritage Register. Under the legislation, only one of the criteria needs to be met. The data sheet is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory of the heritage values of the place, there may be other heritage values of interest to the Heritage Council not currently acknowledged.

Setting:

Carlton Post Office is located in the small settlement of Carlton River, a short distance east of the larger rural town of Carlton, in the Municipality of Sorell. The Post Office sits amongst a row of 20th century houses, situated on a narrow parcel of land between Carlton River Road and the Carlton River, with views of the rolling hills of Primrose Sands.

Description:

Carlton Post Office (c.1841)
Carlton Post Office sits in the centre of an almost trapezoid shaped parcel of land.

Carlton Post Office is a single storey vernacular structure, constructed in at least three stages; a two-room slab hut, a one room timber addition on the western side, and a two-room timber addition of the south-eastern corner. The Bellcast roof is clad with galvanised iron. Remnant sections of timber shingles survive on the western end of the building, under the galvanised iron. In the centre room the timber roof structure and timber shingles are exposed, internally. The core of the building is a two-room cottage constructed from plastered slab walls. The principal façade has a centrally placed doorway flanked by multi-sash windows. A section of the early external finish has been retained beside the front door. The eastern elevation is constructed from rubble sandstone, with two external sandstone fireplaces, largely rebuilt in the 1990s. A later addition to the western side is clad with painted horizontal boards, with a doorway and four-paned window. The southern elevation of the addition is clad with unpainted horizontal timber boards with four narrow window openings and a wide doorway. A skillion addition to the south-eastern section of the building is also clad with unpainted horizontal timber boards, with a central doorway flanked by small four-paned windows; the smaller secondary fireplace on the eastern elevation relates to the southern addition. There is a small four-paned window on the eastern elevation.

Internally the post office has retained the room layout. Several original features remain, including timber floorboards, timber architraves, timber wall linings and construction in various configurations, lathe and plaster finishes, and caricature sketches on the plasterwork and timber panelling in the southern addition done by last postmaster, Captain Ken Nicholson. New insertions within the building include a kitchen, bathroom, laundry and bath.

A c.2007 timber clad outbuilding in the north-western corner of the property, and c.2007 timber decking on the southern side of the Post Office are of no heritage significance.

Jetty (c.1841)
Substantial piles of rocks of various sizes on the banks of the Carlton River, directly in line with the Post Office, are most likely the remains of a stone and timber jetty.

Archaeological potential
Carlton Post Office has high archaeological potential. There is potential for subsurface archaeological features and deposits relating to the past postal, commercial and residential uses of the site.

History:

Carlton Post Office is located on the land of the Oyster Bay Nation.

'The Carlton'

The first Europeans to see Carlton River were members of the Baudin expedition of 1802 who named it River Brue. The name 'Carlton' was given by a whaler who visited the Derwent River in 1806, fishing in Frederick Henry Bay. 'The Carlton', as it was referred to during the early 19th century, was colonised by 1820 by early settlers McGinnis, Joseph, Quinton and Steele. An intended township for 3000 was to be established on land allocated to Lt. Steele in 1831. According to Tasmanian historian Ian Terry, this was on the corner of Carlton River and Primrose Sands Roads. However, following the Black Line, when Lt. Gov. Arthur camped on the site in 1830, this original proposal was rejected in favour of a site on the river estuary opposite Steeles Island. Early major land holders include Lt Joseph Steele, his grant covered land on the mouth of the Carlton River, including Steele's Island, and he built Carlton House c.1824 (THR#11882, recorded place). Nearby were holdings of Ralph Dodge, William Morris, Samuel Thorne and Hugh McGinnis – many of them were part of the exodus from Norfolk Island following the closure of the convict settlement c.1807-8 (MacFie 2008, p.1).

Following the opening of Port Arthur Penal Station in 1830s, and probation stations on the Tasman Peninsula in the 1840s, East Bay Neck and Carlton prospered, due to the official traffic from officers travelling to and from the area along the Connolly's Marsh Road (MacFie 2008, p.1). Several public buildings were established at Carlton during this time, including the Congregational Church (THR#5323, 1841), Watch House (1837, Tasmanian Archives PDW266/1198), school (c.1840, Tasmanian Archives PWD266/1199-1200) and a post office (c.1842).

Postal Service in Van Diemen's Land

From 1806 letters 'home' were to be left at the Governor's Office, and letters arriving in the Colony were brought in by masters of arriving vessels, and then from an assistant to the Naval/Customs Officer, who became the postmaster. Van Diemen's Land was under New South Wales jurisdiction until it became a separate colony in December 1825. A Government and General Order dated 23 June 1810 established the Post Office in New South Wales (*Sydney Gazette*; Mc Martin). The first Post-Master General of Van Diemen's Land, John Beaumont secretary to Lieutenant-Governor Davey, was appointed in 1812 (Ratcliffe V3, p.1556). In 1813 James Mitchell, former Norfolk Island settler, was appointed Deputy Postmaster at the Derwent. However, as the population increased and settlement spread in Van Diemen's Land, a government post office was established. In 1822 the government extended the postal service, controlled rates of postage and time for the despatch of mail, and regulated convict postal messengers; private contractors on horseback carried and distributed mail within Van Diemen's Land until early 1830s. In 1832 when a full government postal service was established there were 30 post offices throughout the colony. From 1832 to 1840 James Collicott was postmaster in Hobart; during that time mail services were expanded and improved, postage rates were reduced, and convict messengers were gradually withdrawn (Green).

Carlton Post Office

Local history records that the post office building was built by Ralph Dodge c.1841, although a postal messenger service preceded this (MacFie 2008, p.2). In 1832 it was advertised, 'CARLTON – One Messenger will leave Sorell every Monday, and return to Sorell every Wednesday morning at the same hour.' (*The Hobart Town Courier* 10 August 1832 p.3). There is no firm evidence to support that Dodge built a two-room slab hut to house the post office, however, circumstances support this theory. The land on which the post office was built, was part of 80 acres located to William Morris, relative of Charlotte Morris, Dodge's wife. Colonial Secretary Office papers from 1842 note that on 5 April 1842 Ralph Dodge was recorded as the first postmaster for Carlton. During the 1840s Dodge also had several mail contracts in the south-east, including Carlton. A newspaper notice stated, 'Sir Ralph Dodge, to and from Hobart Town, Richmond, Sorell, Carlton, and Eagle Hawk Neck, including the daily Mails between Hobart Town and Richmond (twice a day), and the Bye Mail between Richmond and Jerusalem.' (*The Cornwall Chronicle* 23 Dec 1846 p.996). Dodge also operated the Richmond to Port Arthur mail contract, employing a convict messenger to deliver the post. Dodge retained the postal contract until c.1870), he continued to employ a mailman to carry out the deliveries (Lonergan 2013, p.40; *The Courier* 16 Dec 1846 p.2; MacFie 2008, p.2). Local history states that the mail was delivered to Carlton by ferry, from Dodges Ferry. From Carlton it went on horseback to Connollys Marsh, then over the bay to the Tasman Peninsula and Port Arthur ('Carlton River Post Office' notes).

Ralph Dodge

Ralph Dodge was born on Norfolk Island and came to Van Diemen's Land c. 1807-8. He was first granted land at Clarence Plains, and later at Carlton. He married Charlotte Morris on 5 July 1824 and had 10 surviving children. In 1830 Ralph purchased a farm property in the area that became known as Dodges Ferry where he built a home made from bricks at his Carlton property, 'Ferry Farm' (THR#5326) from where he operated his rowing boat ferry service across to Seven Mile Beach sandspit, amongst his other ventures. Ralph owned over 2000 acres at the time of his death in 1871 (State Library & Archives of Tasmania, 'Ralph and Charlotte Dodge and Family' NG3554).

Postmasters at Carlton

Rural post offices often functioned as residences for the postmasters and postmistresses. Post offices were often run

from the front rooms of these properties. By late 1842 the postmaster at the Carlton was listed as Mr William Chester, school teacher (*The Courier* 14 October 1842 p.4; Tasmanian Archives NS687/1/9), followed by Mr John McGuiness (*The* Courier 13 Feb 1845 p.2), and Mr William Morris (*The Courier* 15 Oct 1845 p.2), well-known names in the district (Tasmanian Philatelic Society 'Tas Post Office Payment records 1836-1846'). The Postal Act of 1853 provided regulations and guidance for the day-to-day operation of post offices and the postal system, and introduced pre-payment of mail through stamps. Morris held the position of Carlton Postmaster until his death in 1888 (*The Courier* 9 Nov 1853 p.2; *The Mercury* 17 Jan 1938 p.3). However, in 1858 the residents of the area had protested the 'discontinuance' of the Carlton Post Office. An article in the *Hobart Town Daily Mercury* attributes the attempted closure by the Government following an unsuccessful attempt to raise revenue through an increase in postage rates (*Hobart Town Daily Mercury* 1 June 1858 p.2, 24 May 1858 p.2). The post office remained open despite the closure of Port Arthur in 1877 and the opening of the Sorell Causeway in 1874, which led to a decline in passing traffic and volume of mail.

From late 1888 Miss Emily Thorne was postmistress at Carlton. During this period a telephone station opened at Carlton Post Office, in October 1898. The emergence of postmistresses in Tasmania during the mid to late 19th century was mostly located in small, rural areas. Post offices, such as Carlton, provided various services for remote communities, including mail delivery, telegraph/telephone services, telegrams, and facilitated financial services such as savings banks, general store, and served as social gathering spaces for communities.

Federation and the emergence of Australia Post

In 1901 Federation of the six Australian colonies led to the amalgamation of the six colonial postal administrations to become the Postmaster-General's Department to administer postal matters, telegraphs and telephones into a single national system. The first Australian stamps were issued in 1913, featuring a kangaroo within a map of Australia, ending the use of separate stamps for each state (Australia Post, 'Our History').

Thorne family and the Carlton Post Office

Miss Emily Thorne married John Frederick Alexander Steele in May 1905 (*The Mercury* 25 May 1905 p.1). Miss (Marion) Ada Thorne, youngest daughter of William Thorne of Morriston, Carlton, took up the position of postmistress (Tasmanian Archives NS687/1/9). In 1907 Ada Thorne sued Mrs Craw of Longford for libel. According to news reports from the time, in February 1906 Mrs Craw sent Miss Thorne a post card accusing her of 'opening my home letter posted on Wednesday morning at your office'. Miss Thorne was awarded 10 pounds in damages (*Examiner* 28 June 1907 p.6). In 1914 Ada Thorne married George Newberry of Carlton House, however she remained postmistress at Carlton (*The Mercury* 20 Jan 1914 p.1). The position was taken over by (William) Maxwell Thorne, Ada's brother, in September 1920. He was previously part of the Carlton based farming partnership Thorne Bros with Edward Eardley Thorne, declared bankrupt in 1909 (Tasmanian Archives SC84/1/433 No.28a/1909). Maxwell Thorne was a Sorell Councillor for over 40 years (*The Mercury* 14 Dec 1907, p.8; 5 Oct 1918 p.12; 14 April 1941, p.5).

In early 1932 a Mr Raymond Wesley Burke was briefly postmaster at Carlton. However, by November 1932 Mrs Jean Barker was appointed postmistress at Carlton, a role she retained until February 1938, when she resigned due to ill-health (*The Mercury* 26 Feb 1938 p.9). The last postmaster at Carlton was Captain Kenmare Dixon Nicholas. Although very little information can be found in official sources concerning Captain Nicholas, local history records that he was known as 'Skipper' or 'Old Nick', described as an 'unusual' character who had a 'great sense of humour and was a poet and artist and had a lot of stories to tell' ('Carlton River Post Office'). Captain Nicholas is responsible for the caricature sketches that remain on the internal walls of the Carlton Post Office. The only reference found about Captain Nicholas in *The Mercury* is an article titled 'Mainland Praise for Tasmanian', concerning an exhibition by Moonah-based artist, Miss Edith Holmes, 'Although her work consists mainly of landscape, Miss Holmes is no mean painter of portraits and she includes in the exhibit one of the well-known personality, Capt Ken Nicholas.' (20 June 1946 p.11). Miss Holmes was Fred 'Sonny' Steele's cousin, resident of Carlton Post Office c.1950-1975, he was left 300 pounds in her will (Notes, A Gillie 'Fred (Sonny) Steel', undated; Tasmanian Archives AD960/1/46 Will No 58670). When the Carlton Post Office closed in 1949, Captain Nicholas retired and built a shack at nearby Carlton Beach ('Carlton River Post Office').

Late 20th century

In the early 1940s Mrs Emily Steele (formerly Thorne) and her son Fred 'Sonny' Steele relocated to Carlton from Moonah. They lived with Mrs Steele's brother, Maxwell Thorne, at Carlton Farm, located on the opposite site of the river from the Post Office. Mrs Steele and Fred lived at Carlton Farm for some years before moving back into the vacated Carlton Post Office building (notes A Gillie, 'Fred (Sonny) Steele', undated). Fred (Sonny) Steele lived at the post office in genteel poverty for around 25 years, before being transferred to St John's Park at New Town (THR#11000), most likely to the Rest Home, dedicated to aged care (Notes, Alan Gillie, 'Fred (Sonny) Steele, undated). Fred was a well-known character in Carlton, an article in *The Mercury* from 1978 records, 'For Fred Steele life mostly whizzes past by car these days in a shower of dust and gravel. Few give a second glance to the grizzled bushman lugging logs for his fire, or having a spell beside the road. But Fred is philosophical, 'I've got what I want here' he says. Fred turns 70 next month…Home is the tiny stone cottage with a wooden lean-to at the back,

overlooking the river. There's no power, he uses kerosene lamps and cooks in a camp oven. 'I was born here [at Carlton], and apart from a while when I worked with the Sorell and Glenorchy Councils, I've lived here all my life. ' Fred' s home for the last 25 years or so has been the cottage, built around a century ago and for many years serving as the Carlton Post Office…' (*The Mercury* 1978).

Following Fred's relocation, the Carlton Post Office was abandoned and fell into further dereliction. However, in 1994 local schoolteacher Ms Moya Sharpe and Sorell School students cleaned up the Carlton Post Office building and raised funds to restore the walls and chimney. As part of the project photographs and notes were collected by the class, and 'The Ballad of Old Fred Steele' was composed ('Carlton River Post Office'). Around c.2007 the property was sold, and conservation works were undertaken to stabilise the buildings and make it a habitable space; the project received funding through the Heritage Conservation Funding Program. In 2024 new owners of the property undertook significant conservation work to the building, receiving an Activation Grant through the Tasmanian Government's Built Heritage Grants Scheme. Several specialist tradespeople and experts were engaged to further upgrade and stabilise the building, while retaining many early features and the character of the building.

Comparative Analysis

19th century slab timber cottages
Carlton Post Office is a rare example of a surviving timber building from an early 19th century settlement. Early dwellings using this form of construction in Van Diemen's Land were generally first homesteads on pastoral properties. The first homesteads on some properties, such as Huckamabad at Glencoe (THR#554) or Thompsons Villa at Enstone Park (THR#553), with split timber external walls, shingle roofs and lath and plaster interior walls, fell into disrepair and collapsed or were demolished long after they were replaced by a stone or brick main house. In other cases, such as at Woolmers (THR#5077), Kelvedon (THR#1562) and Mount Stuart (THR#4469), the original timber homestead was not abandoned but incorporated into a larger structure and thereby remained in use. The 1819 timber section of Woolmers and the 1829 Oyster-Bay-pine-walled section of Kelvedon are still in good repair today. The Cottage (c.1829) at Red Banks, Swansea (THR#12020) is perhaps one of the oldest surviving vernacular cottages in Tasmania, being a rare example of an early 19th century simple timber slab cottage. It is a rare example of a surviving timber homestead on a major early 19th century pastoral property. The Cottage encapsulates a breadth of frontier construction techniques, including split timber and wattle and daub walls, thatch and shingle roofing. It is possibly the only surviving Tasmanian example of wattle and daub construction.

Post offices in Tasmania
During the 1840s the postal service in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) was a rapidly developing government department, with the General Post Office located in Hobart. When constructed c.1841 Carlton Post Office formed part of a network of early remote post offices in Van Diemen's Land. Carlton Post Office is potentially the earliest surviving example of a remote timber post office building in Tasmania. Many extant post offices were constructed in the late 19th and early 20th century or were accommodated in buildings initially constructed for other purposes. Some examples include, Prosser's Plains (now Buckland) Post Office opened in October 1838 (THR#1508) in a single storey sandstone residential style building. It was used as a post office until 1981. A post office was established in Bothwell in 1832, however, the extant timber post office building (THR#54) dates from 1891. In 1861 the Pontville Post Office was established in a substantial c.1830 sandstone (THR#657 Stace House (former Post Office)), previously used as a residence, and an inn. The Former Waratah Post Office (THR#7407) was constructed in 1913 replacing an earlier c.1882 timber post and telegraph building (since demolished). The Former Post Office at Port Arthur (THR#10593), then known as Oakwood, the town consisted of a schoolhouse, shop and post office. This weatherboard dwelling was constructed just south of the former constable's station in c.1917. Local memory recalls that a post office had once operated from a small extension to its side.

References:
'Carlton River Post Office', Unpublished notes, undated.

Green, K. 'Postal Service' in A Alexander (ed) (2005) *The Companion to Tasmanian History*, University of Tasmania, Hobart. https://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/P/Postal%20service.htm accessed 10 Feb 2026.

Lonergan, K. (2013) *Kindred Connection. A Book in Three Sections covering the Dodge and McGuinness Families,* Kath Lonergan, New Town.

McMartin, A. 'Nichols, Isaac (1770–1819)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/nichols-isaac-2507/text3385, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed online 10 February 2026.

Ratcliffe, E. 2015, *A Far Microcosm. Building and Architecture in Van Diemen's Land and Tasmania 1803-1914*,

Volume 3, Fullers Bookshop, Hobart.

Tasmanian Philatelic Society, ‘Tasmanian Postal History from 1853’, https://www.tps.org.au/references-2/tasmanian-postal-history-1853/ accessed 3 March 2026.

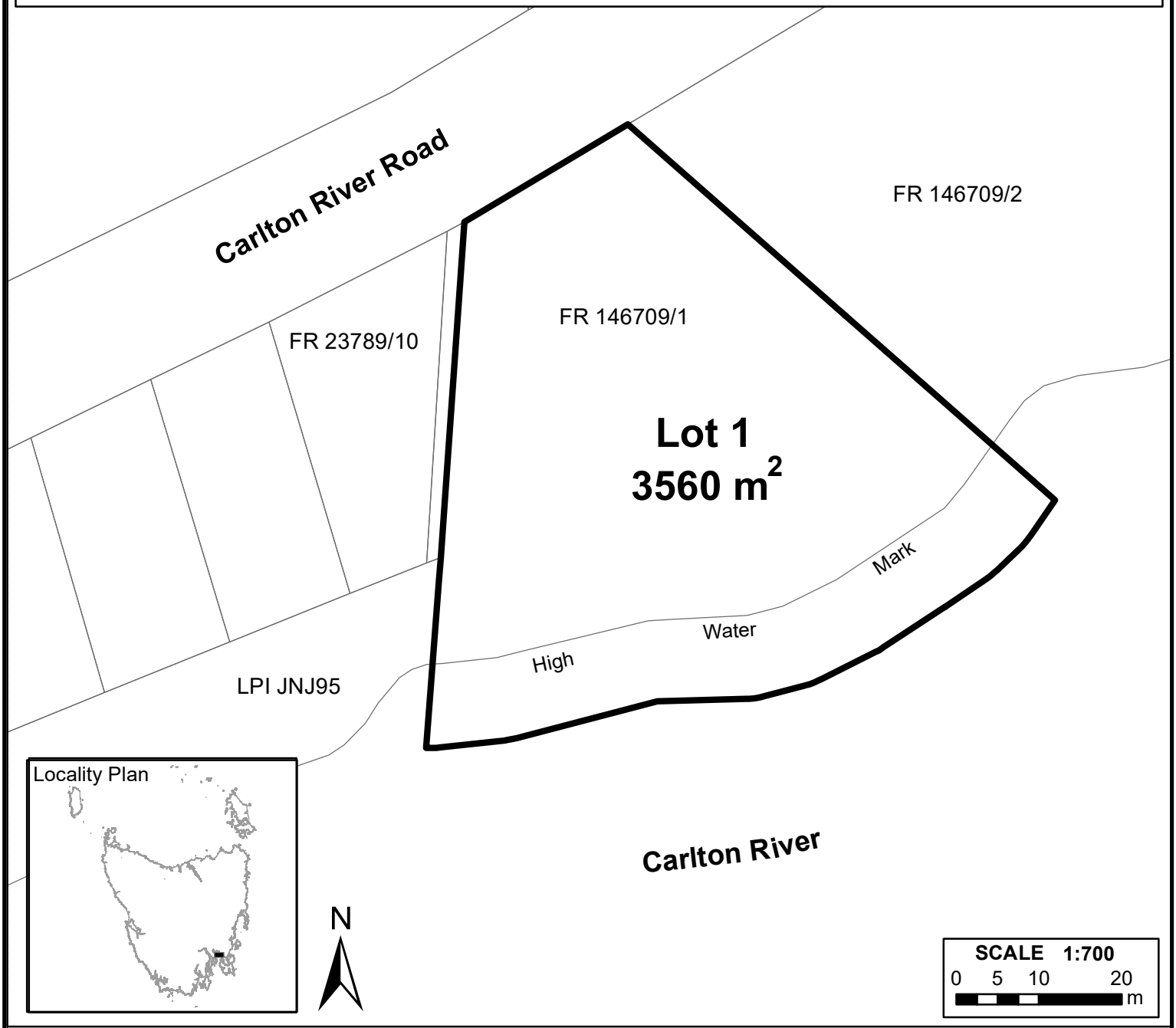
Tasmanian Philatelic Society ‘Tas Post Office Payment records 1836-1846’, https://www.tps.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Tas-Post-offfice-PAyment-records-1836-1844.pdf accessed 3 March 2026.

Note

1. Lot 1 represents the registered boundary for "Carlton Post Office", #12155 on the Tasmanian Heritage Register.
2. Lot 1 is the whole of parcel FR 146709/1 & part of the Carlton River, the boundary of which is marked by a heavy black line, and described below.
3. All boundaries are parcel boundaries unless otherwise stated, details of individual land parcel boundaries may be accessed through the Land Information System Tasmania (LIST).
4. For the purpose of S15(4)(b) of the Historic Cultural Act 1995, this plan replaces the previous registration THR 5324 'Former Carlton Post Office'.

Point & Boundary Description

The boundary of Lot 1 represents the entirety of title 146709/1 & a 10m buffer from the High Water Mark into the Carlton River.



TASMAP:	CARLTON - 5425	GRID:	MGA94 / ZONE 55	DATUM:	AHD	CONTOUR INTERVAL:	N/A

No.	PRODUCTION / AMENDMENT	AUTHORITY	REFERENCE	DRAWN	APPROVED	DATE
1	Production	THC	12155	AW	F.BENKA	29.6.26

Tasmania

Carton Post Office

640 Carlton River Road, Carlton River

PREPARED BY
HERITAGE TASMANIA

Tasmanian Heritage Council

GDA

CENTRAL PLAN REGISTER

p.p. Surveyor General: _____

Date Registered: 29.6.26

CPR 11681