

Heritage Overlay No.: 044
Citation No.: 068
Place: Former Diggers Rest School, 1290
Calder Highway

Other Names of Place: None
Location: 1290 Calder Highway, Diggers Rest
Critical Dates: 1916
Existing Heritage Listings: None
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

The former School building, at 1290 Calder Highway, Diggers Rest, is significant as a moderately intact example of the ‘Edwardian single room’ school building type established by the Public Works Department for the Education Department in the early twentieth century. Although relocated to this site, the building still demonstrates early design qualities and is a legacy of the PWD’s stylistic development for the period, and the subdivision of nearby pastoral estates for farming in the early twentieth century.

The former School building, at 1290 Calder Highway, is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC D.2). Although relocated, it still demonstrates original design qualities of an “Edwardian single room” school building type established by the Public Works Department for the Education Department in the early twentieth century. These qualities include the floating gambrel roof form, wide eaves with exposed timber rafters, and the bank of three timber framed twelve paned double hung windows with three paned hopper sashes above. Other intact or

appropriate qualities include the modest scale, single storey height, horizontal timber weatherboard wall cladding, face brick chimney and the corrugated sheet metal roof cladding.

The former School building, at 1290 Calder Highway, is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4, B2). It is an expression of the history of State primary education in the area, and in particular the small schools that were built, and shifted, to accommodate fluctuating rural populations. It is also expressive of the competing claims of the Holden and Kororoit districts for a school in the nineteenth century, and the break-up of the large nearby pastoral estates in the early twentieth century.

The former School building, Calder Highway, is socially significant at a LOCAL level (AHC G1). It has been restored by the community, and houses the Diggers Rest historical society.

Overall, the former School building, Calder Highway, is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

The former School building, Calder Highway, Diggers Rest, is set on an open site characterised by rudimentary grassed areas with some garden beds and nearby asphalt parking.

The modestly scaled, horizontal timber weatherboard, “Edwardian single room” type school building is characterised by a floating gambrel roof form clad in corrugated Colorbond. Wide overhangs with exposed timber rafters are features of the eaves and help to create the appearance of a floating roof. A reconstructed face brick chimney adorns the roofline at the side.

Other early features of the design include the bank of three timber framed twelve paned double hung windows with three paned hopper sashes above.

At the rear is a skillion addition and access ramp. Although relocated, the building still presents original “Edwardian single room” type qualities.

History:

The first Diggers Rest school (No.1447) were situated on the Bulla-Diggers Rest Road, in the Holden district, despite lobbying from farmers in the Melton side of Mt Alexander Road, whose own Kororoit school (No.1933) was hovering on the brink of closure. (The Kororoit school was probably on the reserve that had been set aside for ‘RC Church’ purposes and used as a church/school since at least the 1860s, and probably 1850s. It probably became a State School after the passing of the 1872 Education Act. It was situated beside the crossing of Holden Road and Kororoit Creek.) In 1882 Kororoit No.1933 was amalgamated with the No.1447 Diggers Rest (with which it had been operating part time), and the Kororoit building was shifted to become the new school - No.2479 Diggers Rest. However, this was situated on O’Brien’s Holden site, on the Bulla-Diggers Rest Road, to the north west of Mt Alexander Road, a controversial decision as many people, especially Melton residents, wanted it situated at the railway station.¹

In 1888 Diggers Rest No.2479 was shifted again, to Diggers Rest station, where it remained.² In 1903 the school closed due to declining attendances, but reopened in 1906. This was

¹ Blake, LJ (ed), *Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria*, Vol.3 (Education Department of Victoria, 1973), pp.67-68

² Blake, *loc cit*; also Starr, J, *Melton: Plains of Promise* (Shire of Melton, c.1985), p.192

probably a result of demand created at the outset of the break-up of the large pastoral estates in the area, in particular William Taylor's 113,336 acre *Overnewton Estate* by the Closer Settlement Board in 1905. This was one of the Board's earliest and largest purchases, and the first of several massive purchases by the Board between Keilor and Werribee (including the *Exford* estate).³ Much of the Overnewton Closer Settlement Estate was situated near to Diggers Rest station (on its south-east side).

In 1916 it was necessary to construct school premises, along with teachers quarters. Still, it remained a one-teacher school until 1956.⁴ Another room was added in 1960; this was probably a result of the new Soldier Settlement farms that had been created on nearby parts of the former Clarke pastoral estate after the Second World War (along the highway to the north of the school).

After its closure the Diggers Rest historical society was instrumental in restoring (with alterations) the weatherboard school room. It has been removed to the Stan Payne Reserve next to the Bowling Club. It is now the headquarters of the historical society. Nearby three memorials have been erected nearby to commemorate Diggers Rest historical sites: the Sanger grave, the former Caroline Chisholm shed, and Houdini's Diggers Rest flight.

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Melton Historical Themes: 'Community'

Known Comparable Example in Victoria:

Richard Peterson in 'Historic Government Schools: A Comparative Study' (June 1993)⁵ gives a description of an "Edwardian (1900-1929)" single roomed school type. This type varies slightly from the former School building at Diggers Rest in that a minor gable typically projected at the front, although the gambrel roof, wide eaves with exposed rafters, brick chimney at the side, modest scale, and bank of three timber framed multi-paned double hung windows with upper hopper sashes at the front, featured as part of the Edwardian single roomed type. These buildings of the 1920s (between 1922 and 1929) were under the design control of the Chief Architect of the Victorian Public Works Department, Edwin Evan Smith. Other known timber Edwardian single room type buildings in Victoria of the 1920s are as follows:

- Salisbury West No. 1773 (built 1926-27);
- Ringwood North No. 4120 (built 1923);
- Noorinbee No. 3889 (built 1923);
- Glenormiston South No. 4079 (built 1925);
- Shetwynd No. 2738 (built 1925-27);
- Mt. Evelyn No. 3642 (built 1924);
- Tandarook South No. 4127 (built 1923);
- Beverford No. 4195 (built 1923-24);
- Wilur South No. 4010 (built 1926);
- Mead (via Cohuna) No. 3745 (built 1925-28);

³ Moloney, D, 'Arundel Road Bridge' 23/7/1991), National Trust of Australia (Victoria), FN 3737

⁴ Symonds IW, *Bulla Bulla: An Illustrated History of the Shire of Bulla* (Spectrum, Melbourne, 1985), pp.175-176.

⁵ R. Peterson, 'Historic Government Schools: A Comparative Study', prepared for the Heritage Management Branch, Building Division, Department of Planning and Development, June 1993.

Of this type of School building, a number have been relocated to other sites, similar to the former School at Diggers Rest.

Known Comparable Example in Melton Shire:

There are no comparable structures in the Shire of Melton.

Condition:

Good

Integrity:

Moderately intact

Recommendations:

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

External Paint Controls:	<i>No</i>
Internal Alteration Controls:	<i>No</i>
Tree Controls:	<i>No</i>
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	<i>No</i>