

Heritage Overlay No.: 055
Citation No.: 119
Place: House, 974-1048 Melton Highway

Other Names of Place: None
Location: 974-1048 Melton Hwy, Plumpton
Critical Dates: c.1906-07
Existing Heritage Listings: None
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

The house at 974-1048 Melton Hwy, Plumpton has significance as a moderately intact example of an unassuming Victorian style and as one of few remaining houses associated with the historically significant Closer Settlement Board Overnewton Estate subdivision of 1905-6.

The house at 974-1048 Melton Hwy, Plumpton is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC D.2). Although unassuming in design (which is typical for a number of timber cottages in the Melton area for the era) and missing a front verandah, the cottage still demonstrates original design qualities of a Victorian style. These qualities include the hipped roof form and modest eaves. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the single storey height, modest scale, horizontal timber weatherboard wall cladding, galvanised corrugated steel roof cladding, central timber framed doorway with four panelled timber door and highlight. The rear sections

of the house have been renovated and altered but do not detract unduly from the original portion at the front.

The house at 974-1048 Melton Hwy, Plumpton is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A.4). It is a scarce remaining example in Melton Shire of small farmhouses built as a result of the Closer Settlement Board's subdivision of prominent pastoralist William Taylor's Overnewton Estate into 79 farms. The Overnewton Estate was one of the earliest, largest, and best-known of the estates created under the Closer Settlement Act 1904. It is expressive of one of the major themes of Australia's history - the contest between large pastoralists and small farmers for the land - and the abiding power of the yeomanry ideal well into the twentieth century. The partial dry stone wall along the front boundary almost certainly dates to the pastoral era. This contrasts with the Monterey cypresses around the property that is likely to have been planted in conformity with the Closer Settlement Board's landscaping requirements for the property. Both the wall and the shelter planting enhance the historical significance of the place.

The original farm context of the property, including its open rural setting, its remaining mature Cypress trees, and dry stone wall, contribute to the historical and aesthetic significance of the place.

Overall, the house at 974-1048 Melton Hwy, Plumpton is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

The house at 974-1048 Melton Hwy, Plumpton Sydenham is set on a large rural site. Nearby are some outbuildings and a dry stone wall, probably built from stoney land cleared by the original selector. The garden is largely overgrown and comprises open grassed areas, perimeter shrubbery and mature stands of Cypress trees. There is a recent round corrugated steel water tank immediately adjacent the cottage.

The symmetrical, modestly scaled, single storey, horizontal timber weatherboard, unassuming Victorian styled cottage is characterised by a hipped roof form, together with modest eaves. The roof is clad in galvanised corrugated steel.

The symmetry of the design is accentuated by the early central timber framed doorway with an early four panelled timber door and highlight above, and the flanking double hung windows.

The elevated concrete floor on a brick base at the front of the cottage has been introduced. The cottage also appears to be missing a post-supported front verandah.

The dry stone wall situated along the front boundary is of combination stone and post & wire style (although it was probably of all-stone construction). It is approximately 300 metres long, and over 1300 mm high, with large coping stones. It is of notable height and cross-section.

The open farm setting of the house enhances its prominence on a major road. Its associated cypress plantings, drystone wall fence and outbuildings are all associated with the original site, and contribute to its significance.

History:

Contextual History

The house at 974-1048 Melton Hwy, Plumpton Sydenham was the product of one of the major themes in Australia's history, the struggle between pastoralist interests and popular legislators for the land. It was a movement which reached its height in the 1860s Selection Acts which were a result of agitation by gold diggers to 'unlock the lands' dominated by the 'squatters'. The success of these Acts in distributing Victoria's unalienated Crown Lands was mixed, and by the 1890s popular discontent revived, this time calling for the repurchase of much of these alienated Crown Lands which appeared too fertile to be wasted as 'sheep walks'. These should be subdivided and redistributed as small farms in fulfilment of the 'yeoman ideal'. The Closer Settlement Act under which this property was created was the realisation of this movement; it would be adapted and reincarnated after both the World Wars as Soldier Settler Acts.

Scotsman William Taylor, upon whose pastoral estate this farm was created, was an archetypal squatter. He arrived in Victoria in 1840 and was the first pastoralist north of the Glenorchy, taking up a run of 206,000 acres in the Wimmera (Longerenong) with Dugald McPherson. After pushing into the Mallee, in 1849 he married and purchased the Overnewton estate at Keilor, upon which he built his distinctive Scottish baronial 'castle'. (In this he joined the Clarkes, Chirnsides and numerous smaller graziers who maintained larger up-country pastoral estates but built great mansions and substantial homes on Melbourne's north-western fringe, within the pale of civilisation, and accessible to business and political interests.) He retained substantial pastoral interests in the Lower Darling District and other NSW and Queensland stations. He was at different times MLC for Wimmera, and MLA for Creswick, a leading member of the Keilor Shire Council, and maintained many other business interests and patronages, including Ormond College.¹

But by 1898 changes were abroad. To add to the inherent difficulties of the pastoral industry (when all Taylor's pastoral mortgages were discharged after his death in 1903 his estate was in deficit), the next generation of farmers restlessly surveyed the vast pastoral estates surrounding them. In 1897 the new owner of the Clarke empire, Sir Rupert Turner Havelock Clarke Bart. had mused in Parliament about cutting up 40,000 acres of his estate to lease to dairy farmers. He was under some local pressure to make land available for farming, and declared he was keen not to 'disappoint public expectations.'² The Victorian Municipal Directory 1898 entry for Melton Shire made the first of a series of unprecedented reports on movements by big local landholders such as Rupert Clarke, Harry Werribee Staughton, and Harvey Patterson to sell and lease (often under the 'share system') large portions of their estates to small farmers and graziers.³

This 'break-up' of the large estates coincided with major developments in farming in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as new science, technologies, fertilisers, transport and markets enabled huge productivity increases. With inventions such as the Babcock separator, the development of local co-operative creameries and butter factories, and advances in refrigeration creating new export markets, dairying in particular suddenly boomed.

And so the beginning of the twentieth century marked a major new era in the history of Melton. It saw the subdivision and sale of thousands of acres of the Clarke, Taylor, and Staughton pastoral empires, and after the First World War, of smaller pastoral estates such as *Melton Park* and *Green Hills*.

¹ Most of this information is from J Ann Hone, 'William Taylor', in Serle, G, Ward, R *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol.6 (MUP, 1988), pp.249-250.

² *Sunbury News*: 31/7/1897, 7/8/1897, 4/9/1897.

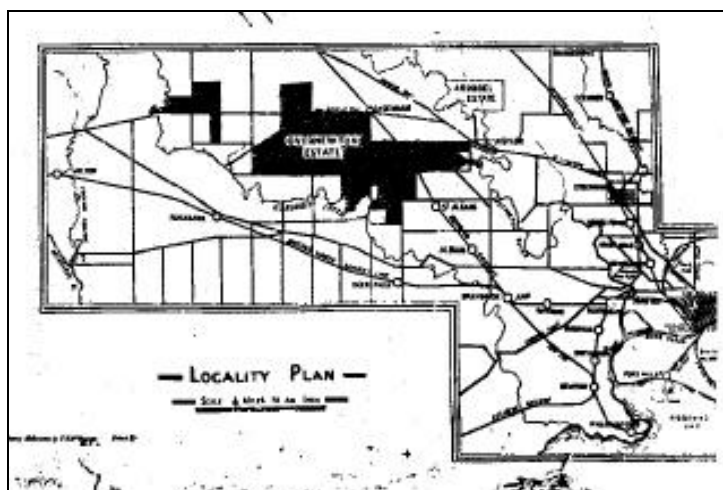
³ *Victorian Municipal Directory*, 1898, and following years.

State legislators fostered this change. The Land Act 1898 had established the “closer settlement” branch of the Lands Department, but it was not until the Closer Settlement Act 1904 that the scheme really developed. This Act introduced the possibility of compulsory acquisition by the government, and increased five-fold the amount that the Closer Settlement Board could expend on repurchasing land. The scheme only commenced operations in 1905.

The regulations under the Act had only just been gazetted when, in May 1905, the Board purchased the 11,336 acre *Overnewton* estate of William Taylor, which included much of the area between Mt Kororoit and Sydenham. 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, which included the *Exford Estate*, and then *Werribee Park*.

Overnewton was amongst the earliest, largest, and most important of the Closer Settlement Board’s estates. It was acquired in May 1905, the fourth and second largest CSB estate (after Wyuna, an irrigation estate on the Goulburn River, more closely related to the concurrent emergence of the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission).⁴ Although soon to be overtaken by the *Exford Estate*, it was at the time the largest dry-land farming estate purchased, and the closest to Melbourne. This seems to have made it something of a showcase, and perhaps test case, of the scheme. Local media referred to its first stage (the Arundel Estate near Keilor) as Premier Bent’s ‘golden haired girl’.⁵

In 1906 the CSB reported optimistically that the Minister for Mines had put a new boring machine to use at the Overnewton Estate ‘where an almost unlimited supply of good stock water of fair quality for domestic use has been obtained at a depth of 210 feet, which will materially enhance the value of this property.’⁶ A year later it reported that 12 bores had been put down and windmills erected at Overnewton - providing water that was ‘mostly excellent for stock’, and some good for domestic use - at a cost of £1,847.⁷ In keeping with Australia’s tradition of ‘Colonial Socialism’, the state government had stepped in to sponsor infrastructure development. But this was still a tiny outlay compared to the expenses undertaken in providing irrigation channels, dams, railways, roads and swamp drainage (Koo Wee Rup), and even house construction (Boisdale) in other Closer Settlement estates.



⁴ Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1905, Vol.3(1), ‘Report of the Lands Purchase and Management Board’

⁵ Moloney, D, Classification Report, ‘Arundel Road Bridge’ 23/7/1991), National Trust of Australia (Victoria).

⁶ VPP, 1906, Vol.2, ‘Report of the Lands Purchase and Management Board’

⁷ VPP, 1907, Vol.2, ‘Report of the Lands Purchase and Management Board’

Map of Overnewton Estate c.1905.⁸

(William Taylor also had other smaller holdings on Mt Cotterell Road in the south of the Shire that were also sold as Closer and Soldier Settlement Estates.)

When applications were invited for its 53 farms in October 1905, the *Overnewton Estate* was described as ‘good agricultural and grazing land’, with ‘good railway facilities - Sydenham Station is on the property’, with ‘good roads’. By mid 1907 the CSB reported that already 129 residents were living on the Estate, with 3451 stock and 1454 acres cultivated. ‘A number of houses are exceptionally well-built, and the fencing generally is substantial ... The planting of trees is being carried out on many of the farms, and when grown, will afford shelter for stock.’⁹

The Shire was transformed by the Closer Settlement and Soldier Settlement Acts of the early twentieth century. New roads were surveyed and ‘macadamised’, and the occasional bridge was thrown up (eg the Bridge Road concrete bridge south of Melton). The establishment of new primary schools at places such as Sydenham West, Melton Park, Exford and Melton South reflect the emergence of whole new communities. Some of Melton’s most historically celebrated residents, such as international trap shooter Hector Fraser, were amongst the new settlers. Other sons of the new farmers are commemorated on memorials of the world wars.

History of the Place

The property, of 324 acres 1 rood and 33 perches was Allotment No.1 of the Closer Settlement Board’s *Overnewton Estate*. In its 1905 advertisement of the estate the Board described Allotment No.1 as having ‘volcanic land, soil of varying quality, with extensive areas of stones’.¹⁰ It is likely that the stone fence was built by the purchasers of this allotment, to consume stone cleared from the property, and is of historical significance as such.

The Maribyrnong Parish Plan shows that the site was subsequently purchased by a WR Morton. He or she obtained title to the land on 22nd April 1921, well before 31.5 years allowed to repay the property’s valuation.

The file for the property is missing from the Public Records Office, so it is not possible to trace the early development of the property.¹¹ The 1916 Ordnance Plan for the area shows that the house was in existence by this date and it is almost certain that the site was occupied and the house built very soon after the lease was issued. This is especially likely in view of the occupation requirements of the Closer Settlement Act (residence on site for at least 8 months of each year), and the early fulfilment of the lease requirements and acquisition of title in this case. As with 911 Melton Highway opposite, it is likely that the house was built within a year or two of the grants being issued, that is, in c.1906-07

Similarly, the Conditional Purchase Lease for the property is likely, in the spirit of the Board’s reports to Parliament, to have been subject to the same ‘special condition’ to plant trees as was its neighbour. The hand-written Clause 19 stipulated that within 3 years he must ‘plant an area of 1% of the land’, and another 1% by the end of the fifth year, ‘with shelter trees of such kind as may be approved by the Board’, and then ‘maintain such areas in proper order to the satisfaction of the Board’. This same shelter planting requirement was likely applied to all the farms created on the windswept ‘Keilor Plains’ part of the Overnewton Estate. This was in conformity with an emerging concern in the early twentieth century for shelter belt planting on

⁸ Lands Victoria, Historical Plan, PROC (2) 40

⁹ VPP 1906, *op cit*.

¹⁰ Lands Victoria, Historical Plan, PROC (2) 40.

¹¹ Closer Settlement File No.273/49.

‘pleurisy plains’ (eg on the Country Roads Board ‘Developmental Roads’ from the time of the First World War). The Monterey cypresses around the house are likely to have been planted in conformance with this historically significant ‘tree planting’ requirement of the Closer Settlement Board.

The c.300 metres of substantial professionally built dry stone wall on the front boundary may date to the Taylor pastoral estate rather than the development of the Closer Settlement Estate.

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Shire of Melton Historical Themes: ‘Farming’

Comparable Places in Shire of Melton:

Historically, the house is a scarce remaining example of houses built in the Shire as part of the Overnewton Estate Closer Settlement Act, three of which are proposed for heritage controls in this study. The houses that are proposed for heritage controls in this study are:-

- Place No.127, 911 Melton Highway (opposite this site). A similarly unassuming example of a typical small farmhouse associated with the break-up of the pastoral estates in the period. With Place No.119 it is one of two houses on the Melton Highway - the major concentration of Overnewton Estate farmhouses in Melton Shire - for which heritage controls are proposed.
- Place No.476, *Dalgook*, Hume Drive, Taylors Hill. This is the largest, and the most architecturally impressive, of any of the Shire of Melton houses associated with the Closer Settlement Boards’s Overnewton or Exford Estates. Its farmstead context is also highly intact.

The Overnewton Estate houses that are not proposed for heritage controls in this study are:-

- Place No.439, *Bonnie View*, Tarleton’s Road. The now derelict Tarleton house, which retains old farm machinery.
- Place No.122, *Roseview*, 1498 Melton Highway (1907). Significantly altered (and perhaps relocated) small farmhouse.
- Place No.123, *Shirley*, 1646 Melton Highway (c.1906). Altered (and perhaps relocated) small farmhouse.
- Place No. 126, *Noorie/Greenleigh*, 868 Melton Highway. Significant alterations to house. Farm complex retains early outbuildings, cobbled roads, and drystone walls.

Architecturally a typical example of a Victorian style, the design quality of the dwelling is unassuming. This appears to represent a common design quality for these building types throughout the Shire. Other comparable dwellings include:

- House, Leakes Road, Rockbank (Place No.403). Although altered with an introduced verandah and a carport at the side, this house shares a similar hipped roof form, scale and construction.
- Hickey, 30 Hickey Road, Melton (Place No.288). A predominantly intact example, this house features a hipped roof form and a projecting front verandah with early timber

fretwork valance (some components of the valance are missing however) and early timber posts.

- House, 1180 Exford Road, Exford (Place No.274). Another timber example of the type with a hipped bullnosed front verandah that has been altered. Only one of the early turned timber posts survive.
- House, 161 Bulmans Road, Melton South (Place No.174). A similarly constructed and designed dwelling, the front verandah has also been altered, with introduced timber posts and aluminium valances and brackets.
- House, 1406 Gisborne-Melton Road (Place No.030). A similarly unassuming Late Victorian example, the verandah has also been altered.
- House, 911 Melton Highway, Sydenham (Place No.127). A more intact example of the Late Victorian type, although of unassuming design quality.
- House, 32 O’Neills Road, Melton (Place No.230). A less intact example of the Late Victorian type, the building features a similar hipped roof form, although the front verandah is bullnosed. The front windows have been altered.

Condition:

Fair-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>Yes</i> –Cypresses around house.
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	<i>Yes</i> – Dry-stone wall.

Other Recommendations:

- Opportunities are available to reinstate a front verandah supported by timber posts, and a timber verandah floor.