

Heritage Overlay No.: 058
Citation No.: 127
Place: House, 911 Melton Highway

Other Names of Place: N/A
Location: Main Historic Place: 911-935 Melton Hwy, Plumpton
Historic Avenue of tree(s): 821 – 909 Melton Highway, Hillside
Critical Dates: 1906
Existing Heritage Listings: None
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

The house at 911 Melton Highway, Sydenham, is significant as a moderately intact example of a rudimentary Late Victorian / Federation era style, and as one of few remaining houses associated with the historically significant Closer Settlement Board Overnewton Estate subdivision of 1905-6. Built in 1906, the house appears to have been altered and extended but its primary Late Victorian / Federation design qualities are still discernible.

The house at 911 Melton Highway is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC D.2). Although altered and extended, it still demonstrates some original design qualities of a rudimentary Late Victorian / Federation style. These qualities include the hipped roof form that traverses the site, together with the face red brick chimney and narrow eaves. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the central timber framed doorway and flanking timber framed windows, and the location of the front verandah.

The house at 911 Melton Highway is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A.4). It is one of few remaining Melton Shire houses built as a result of the Closer Settlement Board's subdivision of prominent pastoralist William Taylor's Overnewton Estate into 79 small farms. The Overnewton Estate was one of the earliest, largest, and best-known of the estates created under the Closer Settlement Act 1904. It expresses 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 row of Monterey Cypresses along the frontage is likely to have been planted in conformity with the Closer Settlement Board's landscaping requirements for the property, and contributes to the historical significance of the place.

Overall, the house at 911 Melton Highway is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

The house at 911 Melton Highway Sydenham is set on a large, landscaped site with young exotic trees and plants, as well as open grassed areas. The house is obscured from the road by a large fence.

The symmetrical, single storey, rudimentary Late Victorian / Federation styled house is characterised by a hipped roof form that traverses the site, together with an introduced skillion verandah at the front (replacing an earlier verandah in this location) and rear skillion additions. These roof forms are clad in corrugated sheet metal roofing. An early face red brick chimney adorns the roofline. Narrow overhangs are features of the eaves.

The symmetry of the design is accentuated by the early central timber framed doorway with flanking timber framed windows.

There is an intact and substantial row of Monterey Cypresses along the front of the property.

History:

Contextual History

The house at 911 Melton Highway 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 the good land which was being wasted as the 'sheep walks' on pastoral estates. 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 pastoral properties that surrounded 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*.

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 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*.

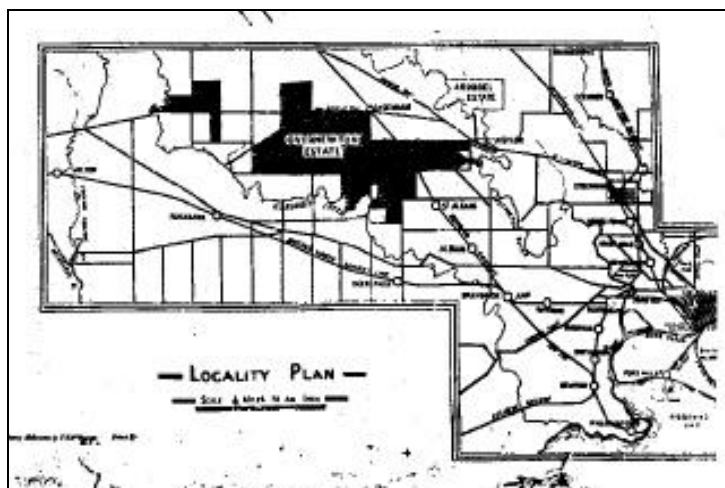
Overnewton was amongst the earliest, largest, and most important of the Closer Settlement Board's estates. It was acquired in May 1905, the fourth and second largest CSB estate (after Wyuna, an irrigation estate on the Goulburn River, more closely related to the concurrent

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.

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



Map of Overnewton Estate c.1905.⁶

(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.)

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.*'⁷ 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 £1,847.⁸ 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.

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

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 Lands Victoria, Historical Plan, PROC (2) 40

⁷ VPP, 1906, Vol.2, 'Report of the Lands Purchase and Management Board'

⁸ VPP, 1907, Vol.2, 'Report of the Lands Purchase and Management Board'

⁹ VPP 1906, *op cit.*

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

Edwin Frederick Hughes applied on 25th October 2005 for a farm, and on 8th November was granted Lot 10, his second choice.¹⁰ He was one of the State’s many new dairy farmers, having had eight years experience of this on a leased farm at New Gisborne with his wife and 5 children under 10 years of age. Apart from a house on a township allotment, his assets comprised a bull, 18 cows, heiffers, 16 calves, a draft horse, pig, plough, separator, and furniture. He also had the benefit of a c. £60 annual payment from the estate of his father.

The c.139 acre property was valued at £1000, to be paid in half-yearly instalments of £30 each over 31.5 years, subject to compliance with a Conditional Purchase Lease, signed in April 1906. The standard conditions of this lease including requirements to live on the property for 8 months of each year, to erect boundary fences within 3 years, to control vermin (including Bathurst burr, wild briar and gorse), and not to cut down trees without the consent of the Board.

In the spirit of the Board’s reports to Parliament, Hughes’ lease had an additional ‘special condition’ for ‘tree planting’. 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 ‘pleurisy plains’ (eg on the Country Roads Board ‘Developmental Roads’ from the time of the First World War). The intact and substantial row of Monterey Cypresses along the front of the property is likely to have been planted in conformance with this historically significant ‘tree planting’ requirement of the Closer Settlement Board.

At the time of his application Hughes had indicated that he would sell his township house and move onto the property, and his progress report of 1909 suggests that he had built a house and moved into the property sometime between July and September 1906. This was a ‘weatherboard and iron’ 6 room dwelling, 35 feet by 30 feet in plan. He had also had a substantial barn, cow shed, dairy, two dams, and by 1912 additional improvements were a 2000 gallon tank, and ‘trees’.

Despite his annuity, it had not been easy going on the farm however. In 1909 he was unable to meet his half-yearly payment and had to request a deferral from the Board. But he was forced to give up dairying, having ‘lost all my cows’. It does not elaborate as to how this occurred, but perhaps the CSB’s 1908 report to Parliament that the year had seen ‘one of the most disastrous droughts in Victoria’s history’ was the explanation. If so the bores hadn’t worked for stock, and the purchase of a domestic tank suggests that neither did they provide adequate domestic water either.

¹⁰ The following information is primarily from documents in the Closer Settlement Act file for the property at the PROV: VPRS 5714/P0, Unit 1318 (file no.275/49)

The arrears were soon made up, and in 1911 the farm was reported to have produced 40 tons of hay, and 270 bags of wheat. Seventy acres of stones had been cleared.

In 1924 Hughes and his son, a First World War veteran, consulted the CSB and the War Service Homes Commission regarding the possibility of excising three quarters of an acre upon which a War Service house might be built. Apparently the ‘savings bank people’ (the State Savings Bank administered much of the War Service Homes scheme in Victoria) thought the land not suitable to build on, and this idea was aborted.

In 1936, 31 years later, Hughes duly received his grant of the land.

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.119, 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.127 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, this is a representative example of a Late Victorian style; the design quality of the dwelling is unassuming. This appears to be 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, 1374 Gisborne-Melton Road (Place No.030). A similarly unassuming Late Victorian example, the verandah has also been altered.
- 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.
- House, 2341 Western Highway (Place No.462). An almost identical dwelling with the house at 911 Melton Highway, the building is similarly unassuming in appearance, reflecting a Late Victorian style.

Condition:

Fair-poor

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> – Row of Monterey cypresses on front boundary.
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	<i>No</i>