

Heritage Overlay No.: 101
Citation No.: 276
Place: House, 865 Exford Road

Other Names of Place: -
Location: 865 Exford Road, Exford (Lot 1 TP 111335)
Critical Dates: Constructed c.1907; relocated c.1910
Existing Heritage Listings: None
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

The house at 865 Exford Road, Melton South, has significance as a moderately intact example of a late Edwardian style. Built c.1907 and moved to its present site by 1916. It is also significant for its representation of the Exford Closer Settlement Estate, and the historic break-up of the Melton pastoral estates in the early twentieth century.

The house at 865 Exford Road, Melton South, is of architectural interest. Although relocated and altered, the house still demonstrates a rudimentary Edwardian style. These qualities include the steeply pitched hipped roof form, together with the minor gable and the hipped verandah that project towards the road. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the asymmetrical composition, single storey height, horizontal timber weatherboard wall cladding, unpainted and lapped galvanised corrugated steel roof cladding, face brick chimney with a

Consultants: David Moloney, David Rowe, Pamela Jellie (2006)

corbelled top, broad eaves with exposed timber rafters, timber bargeboards on the gable end and the timber framed front door opening.

The house at 865 Exford Road is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4, B2). It comprises good representative evidence of the break-up of the large pastoral estates at the turn of the twentieth century, which was a turning point in the history of Melton Shire. In particular it is one of the most prominent and best remaining examples of the dwellings associated with the original Exford Closer Settlement Estate. The Exford Estate was a major early estate of the Victorian Closer Settlement Board and, together with the Colbinabbin Estate, also the first to dedicate part of the estate especially for British immigrants. The relocation of the house from a neighbouring Exford Closer Settlement Estate allotment occurred very soon after it was originally built, and contributes to an understanding of the operation of the Closer Settlement Act, and the failures that were a part of the schemes.

Overall, the house at 865 Exford Road is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

The house at 865 Exford Road, Melton South, has a rural setting. There is an open grassed area at the front and to one side is an exotic tree/shrub.

The relocated and altered asymmetrical, single storey, horizontal timber weatherboard, rudimentary late Edwardian styled house is characterised by a steeply pitched hipped roof form, together with a minor gable and a hipped verandah that project towards the road. These roof forms are clad in unpainted and lapped galvanised corrugated steel. An early face brick chimney with a corbelled top adorns the roofline. Broad overhangs and exposed timber rafters are features of the eaves.

An early feature of the design is the front verandah. It is now supported by introduced square timber posts. Another early feature is the timber bargeboards on the gable end.

The original timber framed double hung front windows have been replaced with introduced aluminium framed windows. However, the early timber framed front door opening appears to survive.

History:

Contextual History

The sale of vast areas of previous pastoral leases in the 1850s exposed those pastoralists without the capital to retain their pastures. But those who had accumulated capital could acquire much larger areas once freehold became available.¹ As a result three owners – WJT Clarke, the Chirnsides, and Simon Staughton - soon dominated the whole Port Phillip district.²

Staughton and Clarke were by far the largest owners in the Melton Shire. Staughton was fortunate in that he had arrived, cashed-up, at Port Phillip during the depression of the early 1840s, and purchased the 'Brisbane Ranges and Exford' pastoral lease and stock at favourable prices. He prospered and so was able to start purchasing the freehold to his land as soon as it came up for sale.

¹ Peel, LJ, *Rural Industry in the Port Phillip Region, 1835-1880* (MUP, Melbourne, 1974), pp.56,133.

² Peel, *op.cit.*, pp.129-131.

The allotment on which the property is situated, Section 18, Parish of Mooradooranook, was originally purchased by Simon Staughton at the Crown land sales of the 1850s. Staughton purchased all but two allotments in the entire Parish of Mooradooranook, part of his vast Exford sheep grazing estate.

By the time of Simon Staughton's death in 1863 the *Exford* estate was said to be approximately 100,000 acres in extent.³ His freehold now included land to the east of the Werribee River. At his death, this property was divided between his four sons. Apart from *Exford*, the home station, two of these new estates were situated in the Shire of Melton: *Eynesbury*, and *Brooklyn/Nerowie*.

The contest between pastoralist interests and popular legislators for the land had climaxed in the 1860s Selection Acts, the product of a movement 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'.

By 1898 the changes were abroad. To add to the inherent difficulties of the pastoral industry (when all William Taylor of *Overnewton*'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' he said.⁴ In 1898 the Victorian Municipal Directory 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.⁵

This 'break-up' of the large estates coincided with the major developments that were occurring 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.

The house at 865 Exford Road is the product of these major changes in Australia's history. In August 1905 the *Melton Express* reported on the local developments. While at that time the Closer Settlement surveyors were busy partitioning about 4000 acres of Harry Werribee Staughton's *Exford* estate into farms, much of this property was already being farmed under the share system.⁶ The arrival of the railway at Melton South in 1884 had changed the local economy, most notable being the development of the timber cutting industry, wherein the high quality heavy box forest on *Exford* was cut and railed to Melbourne for fuel. 'Staughtons Rail

³ Peel, *op.cit.*, p.61.

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

⁵ *Victorian Municipal Directory*, 1898, and following years.

⁶ The *Bacchus Marsh Express*, 19/8/1905

Siding' was established off Telephone Road for this purpose, in an area that had described as 'forest' in 1841, and 'grey box and she-oak' in 1907.⁷

The clearing of the timber enabled the land to be ploughed. For the 'first few seasons' the crops had not turned out so well, 'but latterly the returns have been good, and during the time of the South African War the prices were exceptionally good', reported the *Express* in 1905. Mr Staughton had also provided eleven dairy farms on his land under the share system, with the farmers providing the 'labour, vehicles and horseflesh', 'Mr Staughton providing the 'farms, houses and cows', the profits being divided. Each tenant had to crop a specified amount of land in order to feed the cows in dry weather, with any surplus being sold and the profit divided. Much more money was made in this intensive farming than when the property was a sheep station. 'Some of these tenants are old servants of Mr Staughton, to whom he had given a helping hand to do for themselves and families growing up.'⁸

Whereas *Exford* had originally shorn 17-18,000 sheep, in 1905 it had no sheep at all. A large dairy had been built at the homestead, and the shearing shed (*Warrawong*, Place No.272) converted to a dairy.⁹

State legislators fostered these changes. The Closer Settlement Act was a revival of the Selection Acts, and it would be adapted after both the World Wars as Soldier Settler Acts. 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 things really got moving. 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 when the Board was appointed on 16th January 1905. The Board's second scheme was the repurchase of William Taylor's *Overnewton* in the north and east of Melton Shire in 1905.

By 1907 the surveyors at Exford had done their work and the Board was ready to put the even larger *Exford* estate of Harry Werribee Staughton up for sale.¹⁰ Some 8000 acres, divided into 40 farms, was described as 'well adapted for cereal growing and dairying', with permanent water available from the Werribee River and the Toolern Creek, and the railway line adjacent. The property also contained 'dams and tanks and three bores.' There was a saw mill in full operation, and ample timber for fencing and firewood.¹¹

At its Exford scheme the Closer Settlement Board was experimenting with new ideas. Here and at Colbinabbin it set aside 5700 acres especially for British immigrants. To prevent the loss of a season while awaiting their arrival, the land was 'put in a productive condition by sowing down 1825 acres at Exford, and fallowing 3947 acres at Colbinabbin.'¹²

The *Overnewton*, *Exford* and the *Werribee* (Chirnsides) estates were the only rural Closer Settlement Schemes close to Melbourne.¹³ The Shire was transformed by the Closer Settlement and Soldier Settlement Acts of the early twentieth century. New roads were

⁷ Historical Plan: D/60A (28/2/1841)'Plan of the Lands in the Werriby [sic] District for sale under the regulations of March 1841'; The *Weekly Times*, 23/3/1907

⁸ The Bacchus Marsh *Express*, 19/8/1905

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1905, Vol.3(1), 'Report of the Lands Purchase and Management Board'

¹¹ The *Weekly Times*: 16/3/1907, 23/3/1907

¹² VPP, 1907, Vol.2, pp.175-186

¹³ VPP, 1908, Vol.2, pp.31-42

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 Exford, Melton South, Sydenham West, and Melton Park 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

No.865 Exford Road was Allotment No.11 of the Exford Closer Settlement Estate a block of 152 acres 2 roods and 32 perches located on the Exford (or Nerowie) Road. This was not one of those six blocks, formerly Staughton share farms, which had established houses cowsheds etc. A track towards Staughton’s Siding, the Hickeys’, and the ford to *Brooklyn* crossed the land, but there were no improvements on the block at all. The land in the area north of Exford Road was all described as ‘Chocolate and grey soil suitable for cultivation, timbered with grey box and sheoak’. Parts of Allotment No.11 were described as ‘stony ground, good grass’, and parts marked out as ‘cultivation paddocks’ by the Board, which valued the land at £8 per acre.¹⁴

In April the *Weekly Times* reported that ‘F Abberton’ had successfully applied for this 252 acre block.¹⁵ Tom Arandt, son of original Closer Settlement settler W Arandt, tells that Abberton built a hut when he moved onto the block. He brought the present house from the ‘Back Road’ (Murphy’s Road) when he married a few years later (‘about 1910’, although this could be wrong). The house had come from neighbour Albert Skinner, who did not complete his Closer Settlement purchase.¹⁶ A house is shown on Abberton’s land on a 1916 map of the area.¹⁷

Abberton obtained freehold possession from the Closer Settlement Board after 19 years, on 29th November 1926.¹⁸ The Abberton block eventually passed into the hands of the adjacent Arandt family.¹⁹

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Melton Historical Themes: ‘Farming’

Known Comparable Examples:

Historically, 865 Exford Road Exford is most comparable with other farm houses established as a result of the Closer Settlement Board’s subdivision of the Exford Estate. Surviving examples identified in this study, and recommended for planning scheme controls, are:

- Place No. 274: House at 1180 Exford Road is a late Victorian style house that was relocated to the site c.1907. Retains a rural context. Prominent from the road in an open landscape.

¹⁴ The *Weekly Times*, 23/3/1907; and Land Victoria, Historical Plan: D62(b) (1907) ‘Exford Estate acquired under Closer Settlement Act 1904’

¹⁵ The *Weekly Times*, 20/4/1907

¹⁶ Mr Tom Arandt, personal conversation, 19/12/2001; Parish Plan, Parish of Mooradooranook..

¹⁷ Army Ordnance Map (1916): ‘Sunbury’.

¹⁸ Parish Plan, Parish of Mooradooranook

¹⁹ Arandt, *op cit*.

- Place No. 195: House at 56 Exford Road Melton South (former *Glenloth*). Is an original house of one of the most successful local farms. No longer retains its rural context. Visible from the road.
- Place No.288:- (the Hickey House) although within the Exford Estate, pre-dated the CSB subdivision and is not directly comparable historically. Retains a rural context. Visible from the road.
- Place No. 298: former Cochrane house on Mt Cottrell Road, 1907-1914. Not visible from the road.
- Place No. 282: *Glengallon*, Greigs Road, Exford. A larger house on a larger, model, farm in the mid twentieth century. Not visible from the road.

Examples identified in this study, and not recommended for planning scheme controls at present are:

- Place No. 271: House on Exford Road, opposite Exford main gate. Only moderate integrity. Retains a rural context. Visible from the road.
- Place No. 478: *Riverside*, 105 Murphy's Road Exford. Barely visible from the road among plantings.
- Place No. 273: House, 1055 Exford Road, built from parts of different houses, and reclad in false brick. Recently demolished. Original handpump beside underground tank may remain.

There were originally 28 houses in the Exford Closer Settlement Estate. No.865 Exford Road is one of nine original or early Exford Estate identified in Stage One of the Melton Heritage Study, eight of which now remain, and six of which have been subject of citations in this heritage study with a recommendation for planning scheme controls.

Architecturally, the house at 895 Exford Road, Melton South is an altered, rudimentary example of an Edwardian style in the Melton Shire. Other examples include:

- Toolern Park homestead, 1658 Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road (Place No.020). Built in c.1911, this dwelling features a similar hipped roof form with projecting gable at the front, but also a return verandah supported by timber posts. There are timber framed double hung tripartite windows. This dwelling is of a similar rudimentary character and appearance but it appears to be more intact.
- House, 786 Blackhill Road (Place No.064). This dwelling is modest in scale, with a hipped roof form and a projecting minor gable and skillion verandah at the front. The dwelling may have been relocated to this site and overall, it shares a similar rudimentary character and appearance.
- House, 2-200 Porteous Road (Place No.007). This Edwardian dwelling appears to largely intact although its overall roof composition is more similar to the dwelling at 786 Blackhill Road. It features a steeply pitched hipped roof form, and projecting minor gable and verandah at the front clad in red painted galvanised corrugated steel. The verandah is supported by early timber posts and has an early timber verandah fretwork valance and brackets. Overall, the character and appearance is similarly rudimentary.

- House, 56 Exford Road, Melton South (Place No.195). This Edwardian dwelling is of similar scale as the subject dwelling, although it appears to be more intact. It has a hipped roof form, together with a minor gable and bullnosed verandah that project towards the road. The verandah is supported by round columns on elevated rendered masonry pedestals that appear to have been introduced during the interwar era. The design has timber framed double hung windows, timber framed front doorway, bracketed timber window hood and a timber truss and bargeboards on the front gable end. The house is also of similar timber construction as the subject dwelling.

Possibly the most intact example of an Edwardian or Federation style in the Melton Shire constructed in horizontal timber weatherboards is the house at 111 Davis Street. It has a central steeply pitched hipped roof form and projecting front and side gables linked by a return broken back verandah. The verandah valance, timber framed casement windows arranged in banks and at the corner under the verandah, face brick multi-corbelled chimneys, gable infill and galvanised corrugated steel roof cladding represent the intact fabric. The dwelling at 111 Davis Street is also of higher design quality and, unlike the dwelling at 865 Exford Road, remains in its original location.

Condition:

Fair

Integrity:

Low

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>

Other Recommendations:

- Opportunities are available to reinstate/reconstruct timber framed windows at the front of the dwelling, to replace the introduced aluminium framed windows. Opportunities are also available to reinstate stop chamfered or turned timber verandah posts with minimal timber fretwork valance, to reflect the Edwardian design qualities of the dwelling. Any historical photographs of the dwelling should be used as a guide for restoration and reconstruction.