

Heritage Overlay No.: 107
Citation No.: 305
Place: House, 285 Nerowie Road

Other Names of Place: N/A
Location: 285 Nerowie Road, Parwan
Critical Dates: Construction: 1893-1910; Relocation c.1910 – c.1940.
Existing Heritage Listings: None
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

The house at No. 285 Nerowie Road Parwan, is significant as a predominantly intact example of a Late Victorian Picturesque style, representing only one of four known dwellings of this style in the Melton Shire. Originally built in the 1890s or early 1900s as part of Stephen John Staughton's *Nerowie* estate, it was moved approximately c.1.5 kilometres from its original site, sometime after 1910.

The house at No. 285 Nerowie Road Parwan, is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC D.2). Although relocated, it demonstrates original design qualities of a Late Victorian Picturesque style. These qualities include the steeply pitched gable roof forms clad in corrugated sheet metal, modest eaves and the wide encircling verandah clad in lapped

galvanised corrugated steel sheeting. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the symmetrical composition, single storey height, horizontal timber weatherboard wall cladding, brick chimney (albeit reconstructed), timber framed double hung windows, timber framed doorway, and the timber finials and pendants in the gable ends.

The house at No. 285 Nerowie Road Parwan is historically significant at the LOCAL level (AHC B2, H1). It was built c.1893 by Stephen John Staughton, President of the Shire of Bacchus Marsh, and third generation of the Staughton pastoral family, which, with the Clarkes and the Chirnsides, were the dominant landholders in north-western Port Phillip region in the nineteenth century. It was built in the final era of pastoral dominance, when political sentiment and economic forces combined to ‘break up’ huge pastoral estates in favour of ‘closer settlement’, or farming of the former grazing lands. Together with the other major Staughton properties (*Exford*, *Eynesbury* and *Staughton Vale*), *Nerowie* was sold by the family in the early twentieth century. The relocation of this house away from the brick section of the *Nerowie* homestead, onto another part of the property, literally demonstrates the ‘break up’ of this pastoral estate. With *Nerowie* it is a remaining link with Stephen George Staughton and his demolished mansion, *Brooklyn*.

Overall, the house at No. 285 Nerowie Road Parwan is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

The house at 285 Nerowie Road, Parwan has a rural setting. Garden beds are situated around the perimeter of the house and there is also a timber post and wire rural fence around the house yard.

The symmetrical, single storey, horizontal timber weatherboard, Victorian Picturesque styled dwelling is characterised by a double steeply pitched gable roof form clad in corrugated sheet metal. A reconstructed brick chimney adorns the roofline. Modest overhangs are features of the eaves.

An early feature of the design is the wide encircling verandah clad in lapped galvanised corrugated steel. It is supported by timber posts. Other early features include the central timber framed doorway and the timber framed double hung windows. The timber finials and pendants in the gable ends also represent another early feature.

The design mirrors the brick homestead and ‘chapel room’ that remains at 155 Nerowie Road, Parwan. (HO98)

History:

Contextual History

The property upon which No.285 Nerowie Road Parwan is situated is Crown Allotment 12, Parish of Mooradoranook. It was originally situated on the adjacent property Nerowie, CA 11A, Parish of Mooradoranook.

Both of these allotments were small parts of the Exford and Brisbane Ranges pastoral leases that were purchased by Simon Staughton from John Watten in c.1843. Staughton was fortunate to have arrived in Port Phillip with ready cash during a severe depression, and was able to purchase the squatting runs, comprising 70,400 acres, 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 in the 1850s.

While most squatters were cash-poor by the early 1850s, those who had been able to accumulate capital were able to acquire larger areas once freehold became available.¹ As a result three owners – WJT Clarke, the Chirnsides, and Staughton – soon dominated the Werribee and Keilor plains area in the freehold era.² By the time of Simon Staughton's death in 1863 the *Exford* estate was said to be approximately 100,000 acres in extent.³ Simon Staughton and WJT Clarke were by far the largest owners in the Melton Shire.

Upon Simon's death the property was worked together by his four sons until 1870, when it was divided between them.⁴ The eldest, Harry Werribee Staughton, inherited the original *Exford* homestead part of the property; Samuel Thomas acquired 20,682 acres that would become known as *Eynesbury*; Simon Frederick Staughton inherited 17,000 acres which he named *Staughton Vale*; while son Stephen George acquired 10,000 acres which he called *Brooklyn*.

With freehold land tenure, and in an era of prosperity following the gold era, many pastoralists (or frequently their heirs) built large homesteads or mansions. The Staughton family engaged architects to design *Eynesbury* (c.1872-75) and *Brooklyn* (c.1875). *Brooklyn* (demolished) was built overlooking the junction of the Werribee River and Djerriwarrh Creek. It was 'nothing short of a mansion ... of Government house proportions': with 30 rooms, 12 feet wide verandahs, and a 'great hall' said to be 120 feet long with ceilings 18 feet high.⁵ All this grandeur was rewarded when in 1901 the Duke of York (later King George V) stayed at Brooklyn during his Australian visit to open the first parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia.⁶

History of the Place

Nerowie, of 9000 acres, was the part of the Brooklyn estate that Stephen George had set aside for his sons Frank and Stephen John. Frank died young and unmarried, and the property was subsequently made over to son Stephen John, who acquired it 1893, aged 23.⁷ Stephen John, born at Exford, had developed his pastoral skills by working as a jackaroo in NSW, and managing the family estate for a year before acquiring *Nerowie*, which comprised the great majority of the 10,000 acre property. The richer and well-watered Brooklyn property of 1000 acres remained the home of Stephen George, and was used for breeding of dairy cattle. It formed a picturesque outlook for the grand house situated on the knoll above.

Stephen John was not an absentee landlord. A 1910 report noted that:- 'Since he first settled down on the property [in 1893] he has devoted himself consistently to the pastoral industry, and has made many improvements to the two properties, but more especially, of course, the first [*Nerowie*], which has been so much longer in his hands.'⁸

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

² *ibid*, pp.129-131.

³ *ibid*, p.61.

⁴ Starr, J, *Plains of Promise* (Shire of Melton, nd, c.1985), p.56

⁵ JF and PW Staughton, 'The Staughtons of Eynesbury' (family typescript, nd, c.1980s), p.27

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ *The Pastoral Homes of Australia, Vol.1.* (Victoria, the Pastoralists Review, 1910), Section 20, p.228; Starr, *loc.cit.*

⁸ *Pastoral Homes, op cit*, pp.227-228

‘Among the most important’ of the improvements was ‘making the water supply more secure’. It was noted that ‘the Melton district is sometimes afflicted with sharp spells of drought, during which water ... may easily give out’. *Nerowie*, unlike *Brooklyn*, did not have a good natural water supply, so SJ Staughton excavated ‘tanks’ (dams) in each of the paddocks. The stiff clay below the volcanic surface soil ensured the holes held water, and Staughton ensured that they were kept clean. Other improvements included the thinning out of the box forest, by ringbarking and then sale to timber cutters for transport to Melbourne for firewood.⁹

Nerowie was principally a sheep station, with a reasonable carrying capacity of about one sheep to the acre. Its comeback sheep were noted for the hardness of their constitutions, and the property produced a clean fleece of sound staple. An advantage was that fat and surplus stock could be sent in quickly to Melbourne markets by road, ‘without loss of condition, to meet any sudden demand that may arise.’¹⁰

In 1906 Stephen John was also presented with the 1000 acre *Brooklyn* property, and in 1907 he married.¹¹

During the period in which SJ Staughton built up *Nerowie* the political and economic conditions of pastoralism were changing. The ‘break-up’ of many large pastoral estates in the early twentieth century, greatly encouraged by the Closer Settlement Board, which was particularly active in the areas closer to Melbourne, was a major development in Australia’s history. It was a movement continued by the Soldier Settlement Acts after both the First and the Second World Wars.

The view that Staughton’s and other sheep-runs were holding back development was commonly held in Melton at the turn of the century, and there was political pressure on the landholders, some of whom were local parliamentary representatives (Samuel Staughton of *Eynesbury*, and Rupert Clarke of *Rupertswood*), to ‘break-up’ their huge estates. The Victorian Municipal Directory entry for Melton Shire in 1898 provides an early clue to this political atmosphere in its report of movements by big local landholders such as Rupert Clarke and Harry Werribee Staughton to sell or lease large portions of their estates to small farmers and graziers.¹² In 1909, ‘because of on-going clashes with the Government and the 1906 Closer Settlement Board’, Stephen John’s cousin Samuel Frederick Staughton had decided to sell the *Staughton Vale* property.¹³ In the same year, Stephen George Staughton decided to sell *Nerowie*, retaining only the *Brooklyn* homestead and 700 acres.¹⁴

In November 1909 agents Thom and Capel reported the impending sale of the ‘well and favourably known *Nerowie* Estate, Parwan’, situated 27 miles from Melbourne for Councillor SJ Staughton of Brooklyn Melton, containing 8,500 acres of freehold land. The advertisement noted that the Staughton family had been the sole proprietors of the estate since its purchase from the Crown. The property would be subdivided for sale to farmers. ‘Wheat growers’, it said, could purchase land ‘practically within the suburban area’, and ‘all virgin country’, used for grazing purposes only for the last 70 years.¹⁵ (This slightly contradicted another contemporary report that at *Nerowie*, ‘a good deal of the land is under the plough’, with

⁹ Pastoral Homes, *op cit*, pp.221, 228.

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.225

¹¹ *ibid*, pp.226, 228

¹² *Victorian Municipal Directory*, 1898, and following years.

¹³ The Staughtons of Eynesbury, *op cit*, p.13

¹⁴ Starr, *loc cit*

¹⁵ *Melton Express*, 20/11/1909

between 200 and 300 acres cultivated each year, producing ‘excellent crops of both oats and wheat’. Its volcanic soil, where cleared of timber, paid ‘handsomely’ to till.¹⁶⁾

In February 1910 the auction of the estate was held at the Mechanics Hall, Bacchus Marsh. The local newspaper reported that it was ‘not the success we expected ... the bidding was brisk enough, but there were not enough buyers present to absorb all the lots offered’. ‘For the homestead block, No 17, with a good residence and 2,532 acres the bidding went to £6/2/0 [per acre] without business being done.’ It was expected that the blocks would continue to sell privately.¹⁷ Later Stephen John wrote that he had ‘sold *Nerowie* to Ritchie, Riddoch and Young in 1910 at £5.15.0 per acre’.¹⁸

Since 1904 Stephen John Staughton had been a member of the Bacchus Marsh Shire Council, including a term as Shire President, and was said to have had taken an active part in local affairs.¹⁹ The brick *Nerowie* homestead is likely to have been built to accommodate him soon after the property was excised and made over to him in 1893. This substantial weatherboard house appears adjacent to the brick homestead in a 1910 photograph.²⁰ The reason for its construction are unknown; it is possibly that it was built for a property manager, or have been an earlier house built for Stephen and his brother Frank, or have been associated with Stephen’s marriage in 1907.

In 1915 the Melton *Express* reported that ‘2450 acres of Nerowie’ had been sold to the Brown Brothers.²¹ By the early 1940s the property was in the possession of Lou and Bert Davis.²²

The belief of recent owners of both this property and the former *Nerowie* is that the weatherboard house now at 285 Nerowie Road was rolled on logs down the hill, using 60 draught horses, to its present location north-east of *Nerowie*.²³ It was quite common in the early twentieth century to shift weatherboard houses, although usually this occurred with cottages considerably smaller than this large house. It is not known when this relocation occurred but its present setting among mature cypress trees, and the reputed use of horses, suggests a date before the Second World War.

In 1950 an advertisement appeared for the sale of ‘Nerowie’, a property of 700 acres of red volcanic gently undulating land, 560 acres of which had been cultivated with barley, wheat and sub-clover. The district was well known, said the advertisement, as healthy grazing and fattening sheep country, and for the production of high-grade malting barley. Curiously, the house on the property was described as a ‘five roomed brick and weatherboard homestead, bathroom, washhouse ...’.²⁴ The property had been subdivided by this time, and the advertisement may have been for another part of the former Nerowie property, perhaps that part that is now 285 Nerowie Road.

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

¹⁶ Pastoral Homes, *op cit*, p.225

¹⁷ *Melton Express*, 19/2/1910

¹⁸ Starr, *loc cit*.

¹⁹ Pastoral Homesteads, *op cit*, p.228

²⁰ Pastoral Homes, *op cit*, p.226

²¹ *Melton Express*, 22/5/1915

²² Owner Mrs Craig, personal conversation, 19/12/2001

²³ Owner, personal conversation, 19/12/2001

²⁴ *Melton Express* (nd), M&DHS. The auction was to be held on 7th September 1950.

Shire of Melton Historical Themes: ‘Pastoralism’; ‘Farming’

Comparable Places in Shire of Melton:

Given that this house at 285 Nerowie Road once formed part of Nerowie homestead, it is not surprisingly there are notable similarities in the Late Victorian Picturesque style with the Nerowie dwelling. The steeply pitched gabled roof forms clad in corrugated sheet metal, and projecting verandahs and timber finials and pendants are the most noticeable similar architectural fabric. However, Nerowie is constructed of brick and is situated in its original, historical location.

Another comparable Victorian Picturesque styled dwelling in the Melton Shire is the house at Melton Park, 812 Bulmans Road (Place Id. 8), Melton. This dwelling is constructed of horizontal timber weatherboard wall cladding and has two steeply pitched gable roof forms, decorative bargeboards and unusual decorative gable infill. A comparable variant of the Victorian Picturesque stylistic type is the dwelling Kipenross at 42 Bulmans Road, Melton. This polychromatic Late Victorian Picturesque styled house is characterised by hipped roof forms, together with a minor gable that projects towards the front and an encircling verandah. The gable end features elaborate timber work, pendant and turned timber finial.

Condition:

Good

Integrity:

Relocated & Predominantly Intact

Recommendations:

Recommended for inclusion in the Shire of 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>