

Heritage Overlay No.: 057
Citation No.: 125
Place: Norton Ruin

Other Names of Place: Former Norton House
Location: 1912-1962 Melton Highway, Plumpton (Lot 2 PS447290)
Critical Dates: Construction: mid-late 1850s; major repair and reoccupation c.1905.
Existing Heritage Listings: None.
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL



Statement of Significance:

The Norton Ruin at 1912-1962 Melton Highway, Sydenham West is significant as one of the most substantial relics of the early small-farming period in the Shire. It stands in stark testimony both to the wretched seasons of the early 1860s which forced many farmers out of the district and resulted in the land being reclaimed by large pastoralists; and to the historic contest in Australia between small farmers and large pastoralists for land, expressed in the repossession of the property for farming in the early twentieth century under the provisions of the 1904 Closer Settlement Act.

The Norton Ruin at 1912-1962 Melton Highway, Sydenham West is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4, B2, D2). The place is associated with the first farming phase in the district, which was assisted by the Crown's 1850s alienation of good quality land along creek

frontages in reasonably affordable allotments, subdivided further by the Victoria Freehold Land Society in the name of prominent Victorians Thomas Fulton, Lauchlan MacKinnon and Frederick James Sargood. In particular, the place is associated with the Newnham and Chandler families, who with others had come to Australia at the initiative of a Sussex chapel of the Primitive Baptist denomination to relieve the situations of its poorer members. These families, engaged in general farming, bacon curing, and selling their produce on the Bendigo goldfields and in Melbourne, were the core of a small settlement of adherents of this denomination in Melton Shire. Some of the circumstances and difficulties of their lives, and significant insights into early small-farming in the Melton Shire, are preserved in John Chandler's book *Forty Years in the Wilderness*.

The place is equally associated with the exodus of small farmers, including the Newnhams and the Chandlers, from the area as a result of the hardships in the form of drought, wheat rust, caterpillars, and cattle pluerio-pneumonia in the early 1860s, and the consequent annexation of many of their properties by the dominant pastoralists of the Shire, in particular WJT Clarke of the Rockbank estate and William Taylor of the Overnewton estate.

The place is also associated with the break-up of the pastoral estates in the early twentieth century, a key event in Australia's history, expressive of the long running contest between small farmers and large pastoralists for the land, and of the abiding power of the yeomanry ideal well into the twentieth century. It marked a major new era in the history of Melton Shire, then dominated by huge pastoral estates. The general revival of small farming at the turn of the century, and the effects of the Closer Settlement and later the Soldier Settlement Acts, transformed local economic and social life, and necessitated infrastructure for new communities, such as primary schools. One of these, the former Sydenham West state school, the eucalyptus sheleter planting of which survives, was situated on land excised from the Norton property, and prior to its closure was conducted in a weatherboard house that had been located on the property. The bluestone house was made habitable and reoccupied by the Norton family, who purchased the property in the Closer Settlement Board's subdivision and sale of the Overnewton Estate. The Overnewton estate was one of the first, the largest, and the best known of the pastoral estates turned over to farming under the provisions of the Closer Settlement Act 1904. Although the family has not been associated with the property for many decades, it is still known locally as the Norton property.

The place is also one of the most substantial and best preserved of the few remaining relics of the first phase of small-farming in the Shire of Melton. It is also one of relatively few surviving of the numerous farm cottages that were originally built beside watercourses, rather than close to roads as became the norm in later times.

Its ruinous state still dominating a near intact nineteenth century rural setting, powerfully evokes a sense of the passage of time, and past ways of life.

The Norton Ruin at 1912-1962 Melton Highway Sydenham West is scientifically significant at the local level (AHC C2). It includes some unusual design features and building techniques that have the potential to provide information regarding early farming lifestyles in the Shire of Melton.

The Norton Ruin at 1912-1962 Melton Highway Sydenham West is socially significant at the local level (AHC G1). It was identified as a place of heritage significance to the local community in a community forum held as part of this heritage study.

Overall, the Norton Ruin at 1912-1962 Melton Highway Sydenham West is significant at a LOCAL level.