

HO57 - Norton Ruin



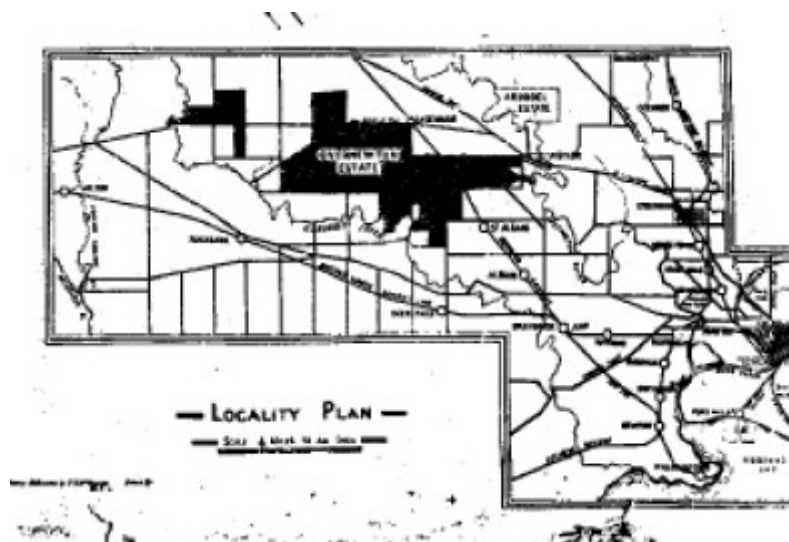
Norton Ruin



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Map of Overnewton Estate

Location

1912-1962 Melton Highway PLUMPTON, Melton Shire

Municipality

MELTON CITY

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO57

Heritage Listing

Melton City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

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 plueropneumonia 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.

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| Heritage Study/Consultant | Melton - Shire of Melton Heritage Study phase 2, David Maloney, David Rowe, Pamela Jellie, Sera Jane Peters, 2007; |
| Construction dates | 1850, |
| Other Names | 1912-1962 Melton Highway, Plumpton (Lot 2 PS447290, Former Norton House, |
| Hermes Number | 30053 |
| Property Number | |

Physical Description 1

Physical Description -

The ruin at 1912-1962 Melton Highway is prominently situated on the shoulder of an escarpment overlooking the alluvial flat, and redgum-lined course, of the Kororoit Creek to its west. It is in a rural landscape which remains largely undeveloped, the most noticeable modern incursion being a large shed a few hundred metres to its east. There is no remnant and little new planting nearby, contributing to the prominence of the building on the flat plain.

A substantial dry stone wall, with remnant boxthorn, is situated a few hundred metres to its north marks the line of the original abutting Crown Allotment 22B. The wall extends down to the escarpment to the creek; it is included as part of this place. Mount Kororoit (or Mount Misery) is visible to the north through the gaps in the boxthorn.

The place is a substantial ruin of a larger than normal nineteenth century farming cottage. Its walls are of uncoursed rubble stone, including what appears to be coarsely shaped fieldstone, while its corners and openings retain substantial quoins of roughly squared quarried bluestone. There are a few small sections of handmade brick.

The building is unusual in that it comprised only a single room.

At its west end is attached an unusual construction, apparently original or early, comprising side walls only, and no access to the house. It may have been an extension for a pantry or store, as was common in English cottages,[1] or a shelter for animals, in the style of many traditional European rural dwellings.[2]

On two of the walls there are unusual small openings at ground level with timber lintels. These may have been associated with a former cellar under the house. The unusually high walls of the dwelling may also have been related to a cellar which was a mostly, but not entirely underground.

In the early-mid twentieth century there were weatherboard rooms attached to the west side of the stone building, and a verandah on the south side of this extension.

Inside, at the west end there is a very large stone hearth with timber lintel. The internal walls retain considerable evidence of a lime plaster.

Nearby is a rectangular shaped brick and concrete lined underground tank, which likely dates to the Closer Settlement period of the sites occupation.

[1] Hill, Valerie R, 'The Port Phillip Pastoral Frontier: A Study in Historical Archaeology', Archaeology PhD Thesis, La Trobe University, 2003, p.197

[2] Common in Mediterranean countries. In France it is called a 'bergerie'. This comes from the word 'berger' (shepherd), as originally it was a shepherd's hut. It was then used for the part of the house complex where the animals lived. Where the living quarters were downstairs the family benefited in winter from the heat generated by the cows, especially. In more affluent peasant families, the animals were housed downstairs and the family upstairs.

Integrity

Integrity - Damaged/Disturbed' (*A substantial ruin*)

Historical Australian Themes

Shire of Melton Historical Themes: 'Farming', 'Pastoral'

Physical Conditions

Physical Condition - Ruinous

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>