
NUMURKAH RESIDENTIAL PRECINCT

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LOCATION

Precinct Boundaries and Map

The Numurkah Residential Precinct incorporates historically significant areas of Saxton Street, Stewart Street and Quinn Street, in the north eastern corner of the original Numurkah town survey. Its northern section crosses over to the north side of Saxton Street and straddles Tocumwal Road as far as McGregor Street. The precinct includes sections of the 1875 town survey and the sections subdivided for residential purposes in the 1890s that were created as the town expanded.

The area within the boundary incorporates historically, socially, aesthetically and scientifically important places and views of Numurkah's historic residential areas. These are illustrated on the map in Fig 1 and listed in Table 1.

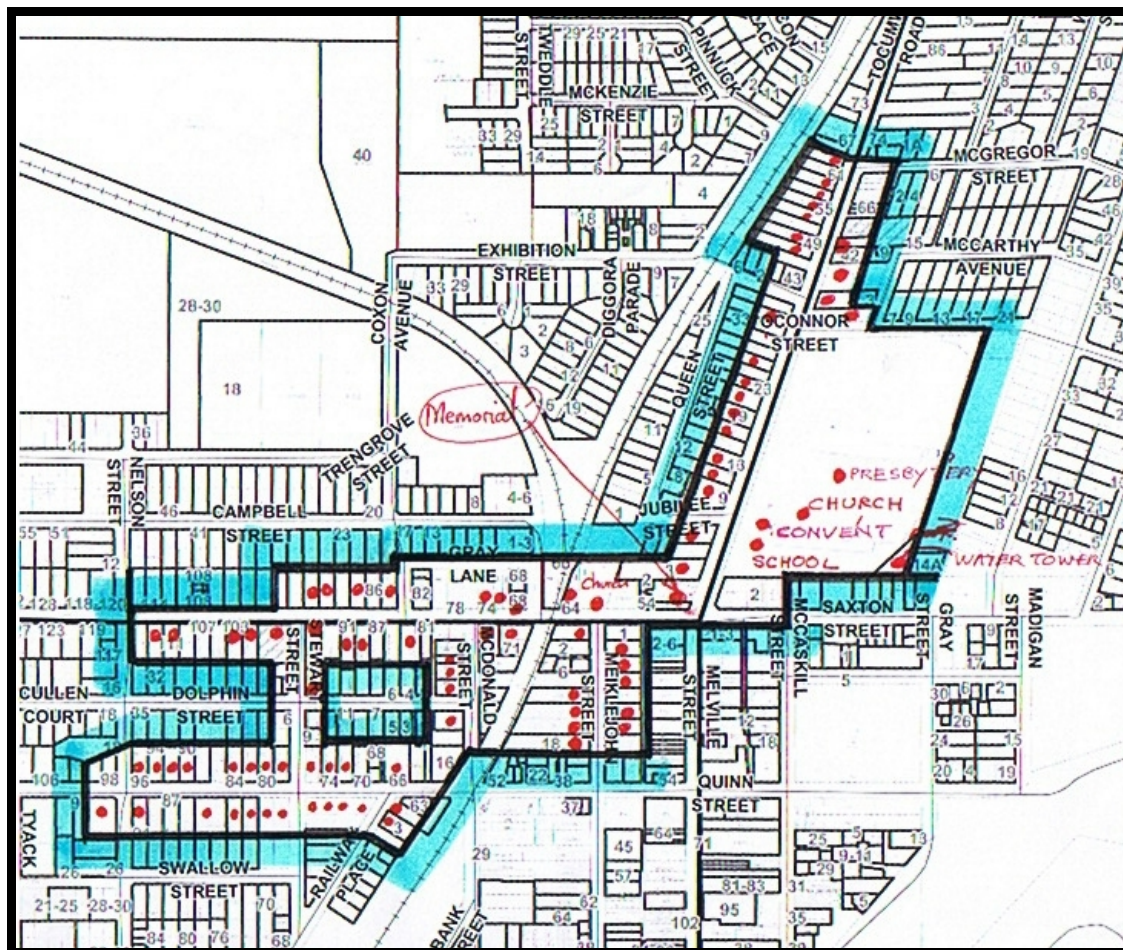


Fig. 1. Numurkah Residential Precinct showing 50 significant sites in red.
Source: Lorraine Huddle 2005.

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Table 1. List of culturally significant places, their location, DB number and historical context. .

Refer to Appendix 1 for a List with Photographs.

Historical period	Historical themes and events	Dates	Extant Places within the Numurkah Residential Precinct	DB no.	Location
Victorian 1880s-1900	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1881 the railway opened. Areas in the precinct south of Saxton Street include those that were first surveyed in 1875. John Gray sold allotments north of Saxton St in the late 1880s and early 1890s. The churches and their associated buildings are some of the earliest surviving in Numurkah. 	1886	St Andrew's Presbyterian church and manse	562	Saxton Street
		1889	St Michael's presbytery	569	Tocumwal Road
		c1880s	House	851	7 Meiklejohn Street
		c1880s	Houses	528, 529, 856, 858, 863	Quinn St and Saxton Street
Federation 1901-14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the first decade of the 1900s Numurkah's population and economy remained relatively stable. Predominantly a dry farming region for the next fifty years. 	1902	Church of St John	570	Tocumwal Road
		c1900-07	House	546	74 Quinn Street
		c1900-07	House	849	12 Meiklejohn Street
		1914	St Andrew's hall	563	Saxton Street
Interwar 1915-39		c1920s	Cenotaph	483	Saxton and Melville Streets
		1920	Josephite convent (1920)	571	Tocumwal Road
		c1930s	House	843	71 Quinn Street
		c1930s	House	830	21 Tocumwal Road
		c1920s	House	543	76 Quinn Street

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The township of Numurkah was surveyed and proclaimed in 1875. Alfred Leahy was the surveyor and he purchased several titles in the area. Saxton, Quinn and Stewart streets are shown as part of the original survey map in 1875, although the closer residential development of the streets dates to a later period from the 1880s. Peter McCaskill was the first person to take up residence in the newly proclaimed township.¹ He purchased land on either side of Quinn Street and opened the first hotel and store. Numurkah's main period of early growth was from 1881 when the railway opened. From a population of just 96 in 1881, Numurkah reached a staggering 1,011 by 1891.

While the area south of Saxton Street was part of the original town survey, the land to the north was owned primarily by selector John Gray.² One of the major early agricultural figures in the area, Gray sold off his land in allotments 'at very substantial prices', in the late 1880s as the town was booming. Not only the residential land, but also religious sites of the precinct are associated with John Gray, who donated the land for the Presbyterian church on Saxton Street in 1886.

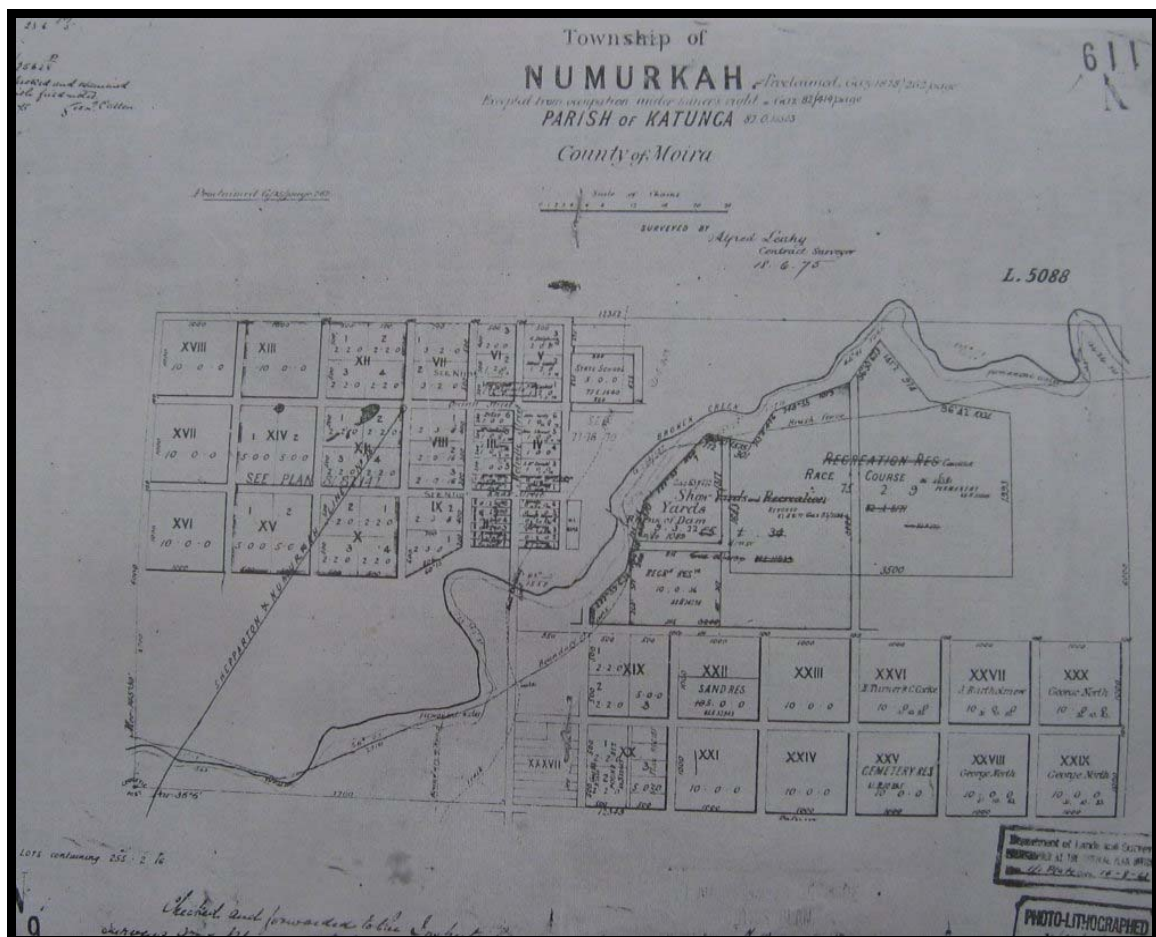


Fig. 2 Numurkah town survey map by Alfred Leahy, 1875. Source: Shaping a Shire 1970.

In 1890 the *Numurkah Standard* reported on the view of Numurkah from the newly constructed pedestrian overpass above the railway line, a view which would have

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incorporated sections of the Residential Precinct. Although some buildings were constructed of brick, at this time Numurkah was predominantly a weatherboard town. The journalist criticised the “meanly arranged” street widths; the “wretchedly arranged...building areas...due to the natural desire to crowd as many houses as possible for letting purposes on a block”; the general architecture with “buildings small, badly fronted, dingy back lanes are narrow and at times dirty”; and that the town was “absolutely innocent of anything in the way of arboreal beautification”. The crowding of houses was compared to “a back alley in a poor quarter in a large city”. The journalist found it difficult to understand that the town was so crowded, in area that appeared to have an abundance of land: “we have no room for pure air, so restricted that we cannot find room for a few health-giving trees in our gardens”.³

Many of the late Victorian houses in the precinct date from the 1910s, when Numurkah became more settled and consolidated, with the population stabilised. The *Municipal Directory* of 1901 listed the population of Numurkah as 1,125 (out of a total population of 7,600 in the Numurkah shire), only a little over a hundred more residents than the decade before. The region was an important agricultural, pastoral and horse breeding area. Although the area was predominantly wheat growing, other farming activities developed in the late 1800s including pigs, dairy cattle, Clydesdale horses, orchards and grape vines. The Shire was predominantly a dry farming region for the next fifty years. In the first decade of the 1900s Numurkah's population and economy remained relatively stable.

The next population boom came in the postwar period, when improvements to irrigation, soldier settlement and immigration schemes increased the population and housing demands of the town.

As well as containing significant examples of residential housing from several periods in the town's development, the precinct also contains a number of religious and educational sites.

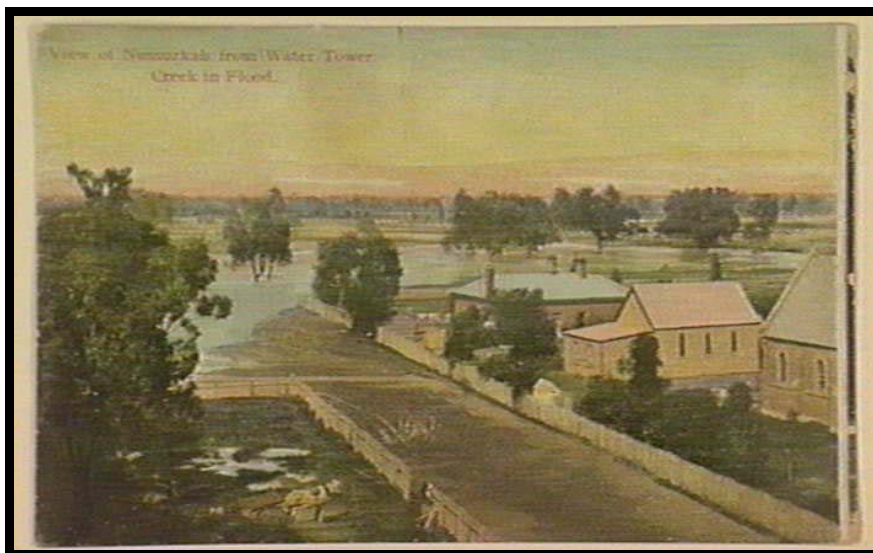


Fig 3 View of Numurkah from Water Tower, Creek in Flood. [ca. 1908]

Source: State Library of Victoria Accession Number: H90.140/844, Image Number: a00782

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SIGNIFICANT RELIGIOUS PLACES

John Gray donated the land for the Presbyterian Church in 1886. The first minister was Rev. John Uruquart, who arrived in 1882. The Presbyterian Church appears to be the oldest surviving church in Numurkah, with the removal of older wooden structures. The manse was also built in 1886. The Presbyterian Hall was built in 1914.



**Fig. 4 St Andrew's Presbyterian Church and Manse 1886, and Hall 1914. DB 562 & 563
St Michael's Presbytery 1889. DB 569**

St Michael's Presbytery was named after the first parish priest, Father Michael O'Connor, who instigated the relocation of the Roman Catholic church outside the 'town proper'. The building was conceived in large part by Father O'Connor himself and completed in 1889. The *Numurkah Standard* described it thus:

The gate will be a Furphy's patent iron tubular and will have the name of the place St Michael's in raised letters on a plate in the centre...The order of architecture is mixed, there being a large element of Italian in its conception...The stable is roomy with accommodation for five horses.

In 1889 tenders were also called for the removal of the Catholic Church to the new site, though it was not until 1902 that a new church, the Church of St John, was built on the adjacent land. The Presbytery was renovated in 1966 with the addition of a porch.



Fig. 5 St Michael's Catholic Presbytery & Kurrajongs, 1889. Source: Lorraine Huddle 2004.

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Roman Catholic Church of St John 1902. DB 570

Designed by architect A. K. Clarke and built by contractor John C. Duncan.

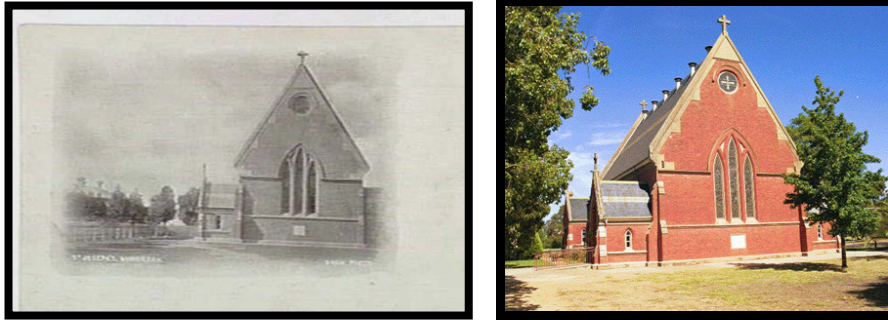


Fig 6 Left: 2005 view of the Church of St John, 1902. 20 Tocumwal Rd. Source: Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd and c1908 view from the SLV Acc. No. H34815, Image No. b27245

Convent of the Sisters of St Joseph 1920. DB 571

Sr (now Blessed) Mary MacKillop, along with four other Sisters of St Joseph, was invited to Numurkah by Father O'Connor in 1890, to occupy a 'quaint wooden convent' in Saxton Street.⁴ A new brick convent was built in 1919 and was opened by Archbishop Mannix in February 1920. The Josephites were primarily engaged in teaching and they operated a convent school on the site.



Fig 7. St Joseph's School, 18 Tocomwal Road, Numurkah.

Source: Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd. 2004

Fig 8. St Joseph's Convent, 18 Tocomwal Road, Numurkah.

Source: Lorraine Huddle Pty Ltd. 2004



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SIGNIFICANT RESIDENTIAL PLACES

There are many significant residential buildings within the Numurkah Residential Precinct. Of these, several illustrative examples are included below. The range of houses in the precinct reflects different periods of residential development in the town. These include Victorian cottages from the 1880s-90s (the earliest period of development), weatherboard Federation houses and brick interwar bungalows. Overall, the precinct represents the pre-Second World War era of housing development in Numurkah, with the majority of significant sites dating to these early periods in the town's history from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. The use of light woven wire, picket, and hedge fences in front of houses in this precinct gives a feeling of openness that has traditionally encouraged property owners to proudly display their homes and gardens to the public. Views across streets, and between properties, strengthen traditional social ties between neighbours and passers by.

VICTORIAN COTTAGES

Victorian cottages are particularly concentrated along Meiklejohn Street, which is the oldest street in the precinct. This street was associated with the early town allotments and formed part of the boundary of the first land sale held on January 11, 1878. Sections 1 and 2 of this sale were bounded by Brenion, Meiklejohn, Knox and McCaskill Streets. The street itself was named after the early settler family of John Meiklejohn, who was listed as being among the town's residents and councillors by the *Municipal Directory* in 1901.

While there was much early criticism of Numurkah's early wooden housing, in 1942 the *Numurkah Leader* noted Meiklejohn Street's 'fine avenue of Currajong trees'.

The south side of Saxton Street, which was also included in the 1875 town survey, also contains a very small number of similarly designed extant Victorian cottages which date to the early history of Numurkah, such as 91 Saxton Street. The north side of Saxton Street did not begin to be developed for residential purposes until after 1886, as the land was owned by selector John Gray.

FEDERATION HOUSES

The turn of the twentieth century was a time of consolidation for Numurkah after the rapid growth in population and economy in the 1880s. The earliest brick houses in the precinct date to this time. No. 12 Meiklejohn Street may be the earliest brick house in the precinct to be extant from this period, while weatherboard federation houses also mark this period along the north side of Saxton Street and in Quinn Street.

INTERWAR HOUSES

The Residential Precinct also contains extant examples of housing from the interwar period (1920s-30s), with a couple of 'interwar old English houses' in Meiklejohn Street representative of this period of residential development, and some other examples along the more recently developed Tocumwal Road, such as number twenty-one.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Urban Design, Views and Foci

Layout and Orientation

Numurkah Residential precinct has an irregular layout to the west but the railway line and Tocumwal Road are located at about forty-five degrees to the grid, giving a significant visual effect. The angled transport lines are roughly parallel, and form a noticeable change of character with the surrounding open space associated with the railway reserve. The extensive open space, grass and trees associated with the Catholic church buildings and grounds along a large section of Tocumwal Road create open views. The extant buildings, including the religious buildings, are predominantly aligned with the rectangular allotments and road frontage. These building and street alignments are an important part of this precinct's setting.



Fig. 9 Aerial view showing the strong diagonal orientation of the railway and the main road, which interrupted the regular grid pattern of early subdivision to the left (detail). Source: Moira Shire.

Views and Significant Foci

Significant views can be seen while looking along Meiklejohn Street towards the religious buildings. The view to the north is terminated by the large and aesthetically significant Presbyterian Church. There are several significant views towards the Catholic Church complex on Tocumwal Road. Both churches sit amongst trees and well-kept grounds which combine to enhance the surrounding residential area. Low brick fences around the convent give passers-by a good view of the building, its gardens and palms. From Tocumwal Road, the view across open ground towards the water tower takes in the trees around St Michael's presbytery and its roof line. Its ornate chimneys and crimson roof punctuate the tree line as the viewer's sight is drawn towards the tower on the left. Religious structures have been

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present in Numurkah for over a century and they have considerable aesthetic appeal. Furthermore, they are significant sites of memory for parishioners, clergy, students and staff.

The use of light woven wire, picket, and hedge fences in front of houses in this precinct gives a feeling of openness that also provides a friendly nexus between private homes and the public realm. Views across streets, and between properties, strengthen traditional social ties between neighbours and passers by.

This precinct is bisected by the railway reserve that crosses Saxton Street and runs parallel with Tocumwal Road. The railway's presence is a reminder of the pivotal role that this piece of infrastructure played in Numurkah's history, especially during the 1880s. Views of the Cenotaph on the corner of Saxton and Melville Streets can be seen when looking from Tocumwal Road and Saxton Street, which continue to be important.



Fig. 10 The Numurkah Cenotaph, looking towards Melville St (1954). SLV H91.330/4078, a29355.

Culturally significant places

The precinct contains good examples of several architectural styles that represent different periods of Numurkah's past. The Victorian cottages along Meiklejohn Street are the remnants of those built on the town's oldest street. Most of them have walls clad in weatherboard, and the roofs in galvanised corrugated iron, as most of Numurkah's houses were in the late nineteenth century, with medium to steep-pitched hipped and gabled roofs with verandahs that give them a distinctive shape. There are houses of similar shape and form in Saxton Street and Quinn Street. They contrast with the design of the large Catholic and Presbyterian churches. Their more durable materials – brick, stone, concrete and slate – express the pride and sense of permanence that believers had in their religions.

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Figs 10&11 73 (left) and 91 Saxton Street. Examples of early weatherboard houses in the Numurkah Residential Precinct.

Source: Lorraine Huddle 2004.

The Edwardian and Federation building styles were popular in Numurkah after the period of sustained growth that the town went through in the 1880s. This architecture reflects a general feeling that there had been a break with the past. The Victorian style represented the colonial era, which was not a suitable aesthetic expression in a newly federated nation. As with the churches, the bricks used in these houses reflect the confidence that some of Numurkah's residents had in their place on the land. Bricks also symbolise wealth, so they embody a desire to move on from the economic depression that many people had experienced in the 1890s. Examples of these architectural styles can be seen at 12 Meiklejohn Street and 74 Quinn Street.



Figs 12&13 Late Victorian/Edwardian brick style and eclectic Federation style No. 12 Meiklejohn Street and No.74 Quinn Street. Source: Lorraine Huddle 2004.

Another aesthetic break with the past can be seen in the design of houses that were built after the First World War. The imperial confidence of the Edwardian and Federation styles was replaced by the idea of 'Australia Unlimited,' a slogan used between the end of the war and the 1929 stock market crash. Houses built in this period borrowed design ideas from the United States (the 'Californian bungalow'), while others were typified by broad gabled roofs, dark terracotta tiles and an earthy appearance. These designs can be seen at 76 Quinn Street, 71 Quinn Street and 21 Tocumwal Road.

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Figs 14-16 Interwar style: 21 Tocumwal Road and 71 Quinn St. Below, timber interwar bungalow at 76 Quinn Street. Source: Lorraine Huddle 2004.



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STATEMENT OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE⁵

Numurkah Residential precinct

The other culturally significant places within the precinct, not specifically mentioned in this documentation are listed in Appendix 1 and are documented in the accompanying database. The history and description that precedes this Statement of Cultural Significance is the source of the evidence for the statement below.

The precinct is **aesthetically** significant on a **local** level. (AHC, D2) It contains excellent examples of several different architectural styles from the Victorian, Federation and Interwar periods. Low front fences made of light woven wire, brick and hedge allow open views of predominantly single storey houses, brick and timber churches and other buildings in the precinct. The skyline is punctuated with high pitched gable and hipped roofs, ornate chimneys and exotic trees. There are aesthetically pleasing views along Tocumwal Road and Meiklejohn Street towards the churches, the railway reserve and the cenotaph.

The Numurkah Residential Precinct is **historically** significant on a **local** level (AHC A.4, H.1, G.1) for its association with the early periods of housing development at Numurkah. It has extant examples of residences from the population and building boom of the 1880s and the Federation and Interwar periods of consolidation and development. Areas in the precinct south of Saxton Street include those that were first surveyed in 1875, as well as land that John Gray sold in allotments in the late 1880s and early 1890s (AHC A.4). The churches and their associated buildings are some of the earliest surviving in Numurkah. St Michael's presbytery was the home of Father Michael O'Connor, an important religious figure in the town's early history. (AHC H.1) St Joseph's convent has **historical** importance as the home of the Josephite Sisters, whose presence began in Numurkah when Sr Mary MacKillop arrived with four other Sisters of St Joseph in 1890. St Andrew's Presbyterian church was built in 1886.

The **railway reserve** and views are **historically** significant on a **local** level for its association with the railway heritage of the town from the late nineteenth to late twentieth centuries. It was an integral part of Numurkah's economic development and it provides visual links with associated infrastructure in the precinct. (AHC A.4, D2).

The **Victorian houses** in Meiklejohn Street are significant through their association with the early development of the town in the 1880s and 1890s, and they are recognized as being **historically** important by the local community for this association. (AHC A.4, G.1)

The precinct is **socially** significant on a **local** level. The Presbyterian church and hall, Catholic church, presbytery, school and convent continue to fulfil religious and educational roles for members of the local community. They are significant sites of memory as places of celebration and schooling. The cenotaph on the corner of Melville and Saxton Streets functions as a memorial to Numurkah's war dead and continues to be used in commemorative ceremonies. Housing in the precinct reflects the pride that residents had in their private domain during the late colonial era and early twentieth century.

The precinct has **scientific** significance on a **local** level. Building materials such as slate, wrought iron, stained glass, and woven wire are testament to the high level of technical skill that artisans in Numurkah possessed. The use of these materials is becoming rare and their presence forms an integral part of the precinct's fabric.

Overall, Numurkah Residential precinct is culturally significant at the LOCAL level.

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- ¹ Back-To-Committee, *Shaping a Shire: The Story of Numurkah*, 1970, p.16.
- ² Bossence, *Numurkah*, p.361.
- ³ Cited in *Thematic Environmental History*.
- ⁴ Bossence, p.266.
- ⁵ Definitions used are from the *Burra Charter* 1999; historical themes relate to the Principal Australian Themes – Australian Heritage Commission; criteria for Locally Significant places are from the Australian Heritage Commission and in the case of State Significant places, from Heritage Victoria; levels of significance used are State and Local, which directly relate to the two legislative authorities who administer the protection of heritage places, the State Government and Local Government respectively.