
Crows Nest Camp Searchlight Emplacements



Crows Nest Camp
Searchlight Emplacements,
The Esplanade and 1
Flinders Street



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Location

The Esplanade and 1 Flinders Street QUEENSCLIFF, QUEENSCLIFFE BOROUGH

Municipality

QUEENSCLIFFE BOROUGH

Level of significance

-

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7821-0083

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO11

HO150

Heritage Listing

Vic. War Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - November 1, 2009

Statement of Significance as recorded under the Queenscliff Heritage Study 2009

The following is the statement of significance from the Victorian Heritage Inventory:

Part of the defensive network installed to protect Port Phillip Heads. These facilities are shown in plans dated 1918 (Read, 1918), but searchlights have been known to exist in this area before this time. Possible State Heritage significance as part of the defence landscape of Port Phillip and Queenscliff. Local value as part of the Queenscliff/ Shortlands Bluff defence landscape.

In addition the following is also noted:

The Crows Nest camp searchlight and gun emplacements are of historical significance to the Borough of Queenscliff and potentially also to the State of Victoria, for their association with the ongoing and evolving Port Phillip Heads defence network of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The structures emphasise the historically important strategic and naval fortification role of Queenscliff in defending Melbourne. They also, through their location, orientation, plan and form, provide evidence of the workings of these defensive structures, and of the historical approach to defending Port Phillip Heads and Melbourne.

Heritage Study/Consultant Queenscliffe - Queenscliffe Heritage Study, Lovell Chen, 2009;

Hermes Number 127476

Property Number

Physical Description 1

Extract from the 2009 study

Located on the foreshore reserve, each emplacement is partly set into the sand, and faces south toward The Rip and the Bass Strait beyond. Originally, each emplacement appears to have consisted of two rooms: a reinforced concrete room and a windowless room behind. The front chamber has an open space for traversing a light or weapon; this is sheltered by a reinforced concrete slab cantilevered over the working space immediately below it. The square concrete pad of the roof contains a circular arrangement of raised iron bolts from the former gun mounting. The rear room possibly served as a work room, rest space, shelter or plotting room. Entry was via a set of concrete steps that descend into each shelter. Both structures are in poor repair with the concrete gradually breaking up in the harsh coastal environment. The eastern of the two structures is the more intact.

Designed to light the Heads to prevent enemy vessels entering Port Phillip Bay unseen at night, they were an integral part of the Bay defences. They also reflect the evolving nature of the defence strategy for Victoria and the continuing concern about naval attack. The structures may also have had a fire control role.

They are included on the Victorian Heritage Inventory as being an important part of the defence landscape of this area.

Intactness

POOR

Veterans Description for Public

The Crows Nest Camp Searchlight Emplacements developed from a 1908 proposal to build electric searchlights which would be controlled from the directing station at Fort Queenscliff. These facilities would replace the existing searchlights, which then required four men to operate them, although it was unclear if the earlier lights were at the base of Shortlands bluff or at Crows Nest. A tender to build the facility was accepted in November and 3 acres of land to the west of the recreational reserve was cleared to accommodate it. The borough council bitterly complained about the lack of consultation and unsolicited loss of tourist facilities when the work began in late November 1908. When the facility was installed, complaints were received about the noise of the generator keeping people awake at night in 1910. Some residents were hostile towards the defence forces after the military reclaimed areas of park reserve land for the installation of searchlights at Crows Nest, and the noise associated with their operation at night.

Nonetheless the boom of continuous gunfire exercises and looms from fixed searchlights became a way of life in Queenscliff. The searchlights appear to have been used on a number of occasions to aid in times of shipwrecks, in particular the *Edward* which wrecked on Corsair Rock in 1912. There were two pairs of Fighting lights at Point Nepean and also at Queenscliff in the 1920s, one of which was at beach level, and there was also a light at Pt Lonsdale. They had a range of about 9000 yards.

The attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941 saw the realisation of the potential of air power for long distance attacks. The lights were again regained significance. Anti-aircraft guns were installed in the local football field, along with a 4 inch gun at Crows Nest to combat this threat. A local resident, George Werry recalled the use of the lights during the Second World War: "There was night time searchlight practice at Queenscliff in those days. The planes would come down (from Melbourne or Geelong) and during the day the planes towed targets for anti-aircraft practice."

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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/>