
AH YOUNG'S GARDENS

Location

SLATY CREEK ROAD CABBAGE TREE, HEPBURN SHIRE

Municipality

HEPBURN SHIRE

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7623-0336

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Interpretation of Site

Small scale Chinese garden for supplying miners in the region around the turn of the century. As noted above, the garden beds were hewn and levelled out of and spread across a very rough and dry hillside, that was constantly being sluiced for mining by over the years. The garden beds and watering systems had to be fitted and levelled between major sluicing gullies, and gardeners using a variety of water sources: ponds, drainage channels, races and small dams. The garden comprises a number of bed areas, mainly on the northeast of the site away from roads (See Fig 1). Ah Young and his wife sold produce from a stall at their house north of and set back from Slaty Ck Road next to a smaller garden area below a water race. A large Brewery (Quinns) operated on the south side of Slaty Ck Road. Braggs Water Race and Dam is listed on the Heritage Inventory (HI) (Number H7623-0333) in relation to Ah Youngs Garden as highly significant in interpretation of Creswick cultural and mining history. The race was constructed in the early 1850s to service the Humbug Hill Sluicing Company's claims at Humbug Hill. Water from the race was sold to miners along the race route and later the race was taken over by the Council and was partly leased to Chinese miners. The race (and a small dam) allowed sluicing of the southern parts of Humbug Hill – in the area of Ah Youngs Gardens. The race and dam appear to fall into disuse by the early 20th century. Races built later by other companies (Russells Race) were higher in the landscape and so allowed mining of the higher parts of Humbug Hill.

Archaeological Significance This site has a high level of archaeological significance. The features include terraces and dam walls and Chinese artefacts. The site is a rare intact local example of a small scale Chinese garden.

The site has a high *level* of historical significance at a local *level*. Due to the excellent preservation of a large part of the Creswick goldfield, the intertwined *narratives* of mining, water supply, environmental consequences and rapidly *evolving* legislation can be read in the landscape. At a state *level* the site contributes to broader narratives of water supply and mining (Victorian Historical Theme 4.5 & 4.6) and informs the development of both mining and water management laws for the State of Victoria.

Historical Significance The site contributes to the understanding of the Chinese community at Creswick. The garden system is a rare local example on the Creswick alluvial goldfield that together with water races and dams make up an important and well preserved cultural landscape of water management. Combined with Creswick's strong forestry education facilities and proximity to Melbourne and Ballarat, an increased awareness in this well preserved mining complex could provide Creswick with excellent educational and tourism opportunities illustrating mining techniques and how mining shaped Victoria's water laws

Hermes Number 195111

Property Number

History

Ah Young created a series of small terrace gardens on the south-western slopes of Humbug Hill in the 1880s and 1890s. He was one of at least 30 Chinese men working a garden in the Slaty Creek and Mopoke area at this time. Most had held a Miner's Right for many years, and occupied a hut and a small patch of land, from 8 to 1 acre in size (La Gerche 1885). Forester John La Gerche kept a close eye on the Chinese gardeners and fossickers scattered through the Creswick forests, and at times he intervened on their behalf to ensure they received fair treatment (Taylor 1998: 102).

Ah Young built terraces that extended shelves of natural level ground, and in one case he constructed a low retaining wall on the downslope slide to retain water and prevent run-off. The soil in the terraces has mostly reverted to clay, but originally it had been improved with compost and manure. Ah Young also built at least two small dams for watering the gardens. The higher of these was a simple clay wall held together with tree branches, about 3-4 metres across, with water brought in from a race to the north. An apple tree that had grown for more than a century beside this dam was killed in the drought several years ago (D. Henderson pers. comm. 2 March 2012).

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Ah Young developed the garden in the 1880s and ran it with his European wife until the late 1920s, when she died and he returned to China. David Henderson's mother (born 1913) had childhood memories (recorded by David Henderson in the 1950s, personal Communications 2010 and 2020) of buying vegetables from Ah Young's house where there was also a small patch of garden north of Slaty Ck Rd, hidden from the road opposite the Brewery (David Henderson Map 2012). The garden (and the market) probably changed a lot over the years as land was sluiced and bed areas were fitted in between mining activity. Some writers estimate that 20-30 people lived at and worked in the gardens at various times. The area has remained relatively undisturbed, until recent incursions by mountain bikes and amateur fossickers with metal detectors.

Even after the main gold rush ended in the 1860s, the Cabbage Tree Flat south of Humbug Hill was an extremely active area, with hotels, dredges and their offices, a three story malthouse and brewery, a bank and several other businesses. [Creswick Advertiser 28/6/1860, quoted by Henderson 2010]. There was also a large vineyard and cherry orchard, a brewery and a thriving school on Cabbage Tree Hill (DC Henderson Map 2012). Mining activity changed constantly, as new and methods and tools (e.g. pumps) were introduced and as mining and water infrastructure companies came and went. It is in this context that Ah Young and his wife developed and ran this large garden for 30 years in a changing but often vibrant market. The size/area of land used probably varied with the local population and markets, and also with the rains and seasons and water supply available. Ah Young is said to have held a mining license, and used water delivered by (Bragg's and Russell's and probably other) water races, mainly for sluicing activity by other miners (Taylor 1998).

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/>