
SLATY CREEK CHINESE GARDEN AND SLUICING SITE

Location

SLATY CREEK ROAD CABBAGE TREE, HEPBURN SHIRE

Municipality

HEPBURN SHIRE

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7623-0343

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 4, 2021

The site has important historic values if viewed and presented in the context of the Chinese adaptation and integration into the social and physical landscape of the Goldrush era and following years into the 1920s. The garden could be well presented with some minor work on rebuilding some examples of the garden beds and water races and wells and channels that formed the water supply. The deeply sluiced gully to the south of the garden shows the close association of the gardeners with miners and mining. Mine shafts with rounded corners are seen to the south, and represent the Chinese belief that spirits are discouraged by avoiding square cornered shafts.

The site on its own is important, but (with other local sites) it is a important component of the very major Creswick Mining Landscape, and also the Creswick Water Race Network and - which stands unique as the only surviving 1850-90s gold mining water distribution system in Victoria. This large network (180 km) had major significance in enabling gold mining and gold wealth of Victoria, but also in the development of legislation on water use and on environmental law on mining waste (see Davies, Lawrence and Turnbull 2014).

Interpretation of Site	<p>This Chinese Garden site and gardening practice clearly had to be 'integrated' (by gardeners and miners) into the development and operation of gold mining practices, especially sluicing of gullies to the south and the north of the garden. The Garden bed area (Fig. 2) is situated on the northern edge of a major sluiced gully, and there is a substantial drain and bank on the south and southeast side of the bed-area to prevent erosion into the deb area of the garden. The inherently poor quality Ordovician soils, required careful selection of a flat area of land, building up soil and beds with available alluvium and organic (manure) matter, and then careful protection of the area from mining practices and erosion. It is surprising that the garden could have been maintained (and still survives) under such high pressure from land and people. Today the site can be accessed from Slaty Creek Road, where a small fire dam east of the road marks a junction with an eroded 4WD track. Walk down the track downhill (northeast) towards Slaty Creek, passing the large dam on the left after 150 metres. The gardens site is about 200 m further down the track on the right (south) side. The site can also be conveniently reached by walkers on the 'iconic' Goldfields Trail (part of the Great Dividing Trail), which runs parallel Slaty Creek 30 m east of the northeast corner of the garden site. Slaty Creek Campsite No 3 is about 600 m to the north of the garden site.</p>
Hermes Number	207144
Property Number	

History

The garden would have been established in the late 1850s when newly arrived Chinese miners sought means of living in the bush among predominantly European miner settlers. When the main Creswick gold rush ended around 1860, many Chinese stayed on and mined the areas initially taken up by Europeans, or ran other enterprises. The banks of Slaty Creek, particularly upstream of this garden site, were sluiced by many hundreds of Chinese people living along the Creek – resulting in deep gullies that have partly revegetated today but are seldom visited. Many Chinese left the Creswick area by the late 1900s, partly as a result of harsh conditions and both official and community discrimination.

La Gerche in the 1880s reported (Taylor 1998) Ah Chow was associated with a bend on Slaty Creek at the Ironstone location just of the Chinese Garden and Sluicing site - around the turn of the century. Len Goldsmith (2000:2) recalled 'An old Chinaman lived up on the bank there. He had his garden down there on the flat and surfacing work surrounded it.'

As the number of Chinese dwindled in the 1880s and 1890s, some continued to live in huts and grow vegetables as they had for many years. They were recognised as expert gardeners and were generally 'industrious, honest, generous, and law abiding (Graham 1987:63). John La Gerche (1885) recorded the names and locations of some Chinese during his patrols through nearby Creswick forests in 1885:

- Ah Li You (hut) Mopoke 13 years
- Ah Loch (hut) Slaty Creek 13 years
- Fat Yet (hut) Mopoke 8 years
- Ah Kam (hut) Mopoke 14 years
- Gat You (1 acre garden & hut) Forty Foot 18 years
- Lou Hem (1 acre garden & hut) Forty Foot 18 years
- Li Ha (hut) Slaty Creek 18 years
- Ah Chow (hut) Slaty Creek 18 years
- Ah Yat (hut) Mopoke 18 years
- For Chong Ki Fong (hut) Mopoke 18 years

Although other names of other Chinese gardeners who developed and ran this particular garden near Slaty Creek are not known, there is considerable evidence of the involvement of Chinese immigrants in mining and in

developing the network of water races in the Cabbage Tree area. Davies et al (2014) report that Chinese often partnered with European miners in developing water infrastructure vital to the needs of mining and gardening in the Slaty Creek and Mopoke Gully areas. For example, the miner John Wolfe and Wun Yee developed the Slaty

Creek Hydraulic Sluicing Company, which probably owned the main race supplying this Chinese Garden site and surrounding sluicing. However, some Chinese held mining licences and Chinese-built races were important in providing water for mining and several Gardens in the area (most of which have now been ruined).

Relatively recent knowledge of this garden site was publicised in the 1970s when the large area of beds was 'rediscovered' after a large fire in the Slaty Creek area, by the sister of Creswick Historian David Henderson (Henderson 2010).

Notes From Graham 1942 (p52).

Creswick's first gold licence was issued in late 1853 (p52). By then most of Creswick's creeks, flats and hills had been 'opened' by diggers but the population was small until mid 1854 when a rush of diggers arrived. By late 1854 miners tents extended along the main road of Creswick and west along Creswick Creek to Long Point and east on Creswick Creek and Slaty Ck and their tributaries. Most miners slept on the ground on a bed of leaves.

Tents for

stores later progressed to slab huts, as protection against burglars.

[Graham p 61] After the richest parts had been worked out, Chinese parties began operating on the remainder, by removing the

alluvial material by excavating down to the Silurian bedrock

From 'Semmens Collection'. University of Melbourne (See Creswick Museum Facebooks site).

The experience of Chinese miners after the Creswick gold rush was tough. By the 1860s the gold that brought them to 'New Gold

Mountain' was largely gone. However, some stayed on, occupying small huts on the outskirts of town. Living conditions were

hard, but they got by through maintaining small gardens, fossicking and sluicing shallow claims. Rearing pigs was another aspect

of their lives.

Only some of the appalling treatment received by Chinese has been documented. One of many controversies occurred in July

1902, when an elderly Chinese gardener and long-time Creswick resident One Sin was shot by a seventeen year old local:

<http://bit.ly/VxJFEI>. Although the death was suspicious, the shooting was ruled to be accidental. By this time the Chinese

population was aging and, with no new immigrants arriving, diminished to a small group. This led "Bobby Fun Yet to be labelled

as "the last Chinaman in Creswick. In 1923 "Bobby" Fun Yet died aged 76.

See the album here: <http://on.fb.me/1uko8uZ>

From: Fullwood (2014) Spirit of China in Creswick, Creswick Museum.

Most Chinese who travelled to the Australia G Rush in the mid 1850s were men from the Pearl Delta, Guangdong and Fujian

Province. In the year 1856, 12 396 arrived in one year. Many made the voyage under a credit-ticket system managed by

brokers and emigration agents. Not all made their fortune, and some families in China were left to pay the debt.

Chinese had been in Australia since the 1840s working as shepherds and farmers, but the large influx of 'different looking'

people arriving in the 1850s aroused fears among many of the Europeans, who made it difficult for the Chinese to gain rights

available to other immigrants. In 1855 the Colony of Victoria imposed a 10 pound landing tax for Chinese gold seekers, so

from 1857 the agents chose to disembark Chinese passengers at Robe in South Australia and walked about 350 - 400 km to

Victoria. A total of 33 ships arrived in 1857 with nearly 15 000 aboard. In 1863 the landing stopped because Victoria

pressured S Australia to restrict Chinese entry.

In 1864 W Moodie recorded (in his book 'A pioneer in Western Victoria') records passing hundreds of Chinese diggers

walking in single file, each with the proverbial two baskets hanging from a pole – going to the diggings. Conditions for the Chinese were hard, with regulations on living sites, residence tax enforced by a local police commissioner. Chinese in Creswick lived in tents and later huts in Black Lead camp (now in Calembeen Park), but many set up camps south east of town in Slaty Creek and Mopoke Gully, Humbug Hill and other mining sites outside Creswick. Some became storekeepers or set up gardens and hawked their produce to other settlers in and around the town. (Fullwood 2014 p6). Records of court proceedings show that pork was one common product marketed by Chinese gardeners. 'Examples of costs of garden produce are: 4 pounds of pork – @ 3 shillings; Cabbage @ 6 pence; 28 pounds of Rice 7.5 shillings.'

Court records also show settlements of problems between Chinese husbands and European wives. The Creswick Advertiser records that anti-Chinese feelings led to the formation of a 'Creswick Anti-Chinese Immigration Society'. Despite rates for Chinese labour being much lower (27 shillings per week) than for European labour (40 shillings per week), very few Chinese were employed on large mines around Creswick. Chinese preferred to work mainly above ground and with other Chinese surface diggers, or in gardening, building of water races or other work. Some indication of hardships encountered in the Goldfields by Chinese miners are mentioned in a study of the names recorded of deaths from between 1854-1955 in cemeteries in the Ballarat area (Brumley et al 1953). Most Chinese deaths in Creswick were through mining accidents, such as 'fall of earth', 'fall down shaft', 'congestion of lungs' and other violent causes such as 'fracture of spine' and stabbing. There were also deaths from gastroenteritis, pulmonary disease, suicide and 'effects of opium. Very few deaths were of natural causes.

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