

# BURCHETT CREEK BRIDGE



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SOHE 2008



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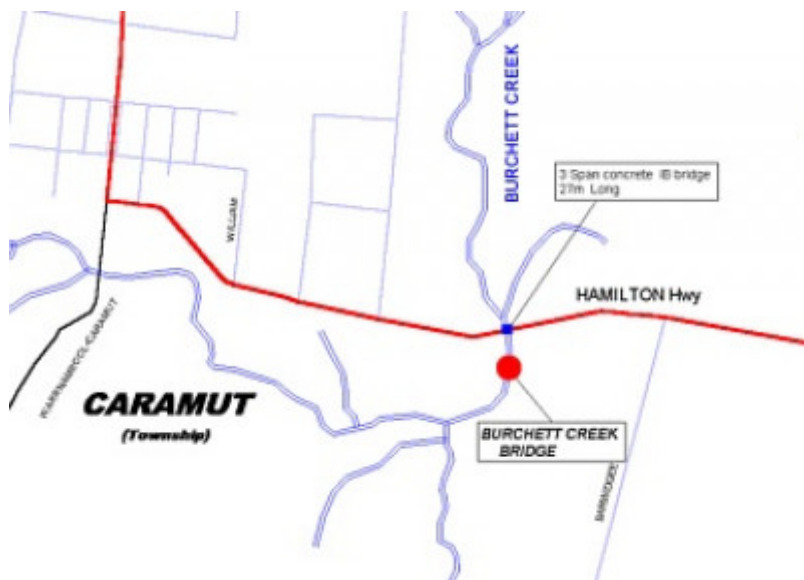
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1 burchett creek bridge ntv



burchett bridge plan

## Location

OVER BURCHETT CREEK, OFF HAMILTON HIGHWAY CARAMUT, MOYNE SHIRE

## **Municipality**

MOYNE SHIRE

## **Level of significance**

Registered

## **Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number**

H1856

## **Heritage Overlay Numbers**

HO35

## **VHR Registration**

November 18, 1999

## **Heritage Listing**

Victorian Heritage Register

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## **Statement of Significance**

Last updated on - September 3, 1999

### What is significant?

Burchett Creek Bridge is situated beside the modern Hamilton Highway on the old Caramut-Hexham Road crossing of Burchett Creek immediately east of Caramut township. Although not possible to date exactly, the bridge is of the period before the 1893 Depression checked bridge construction generally, and most likely dates to the later 1870s when the Hexham-Caramut Road was first officially classified as a Main Road. It is a three-span timber-beam bridge on timber piers and timber abutments, with fender piles, squared-timber beams and a transverse-timber deck, heavy diagonally-spliced squared-timber gravel beams, and the meagre remnants of timber side-rails. Heavy squared-timber caps at the top of timber piers have ogee-shaped ends, and the corbels above the piers are also of classical ogee shape. The timber deck has been covered with gravel in traditional colonial Main Road style, and later had bitumen surfacing. It is a relatively low-level bridge with short spans, a deck length of 13.2 metres, width of 6 metres, and a slightly curved or 'humped' profile. Beneath the bridge is the substantial remains of what appears to be an unusually well-constructed ford of squared bluestone. The bridge is not in use. It is in remarkably good structural condition for its age. Situated in open and rolling grassland country, its attractive antique profile stands out clearly from the highway.

### How is it Significant?

Burchett Creek bridge is of historical and scientific (technical) significance to Victoria.

### Why is it Significant?

It is of historical significance for its location on a crossing place on the original road between Portland and Melbourne, the two first places of permanent European settlement in Victoria. It is significantly enhanced by having been built above the remains of a bluestone ford. The remains of the two earliest phases of stream crossing works - fords and timber bridges - at the same crossing, are rare in Victoria; the ford is probably a relic of the original works on the Portland Road. Probably constructed in the mid-late 1870s, the bridge is likely to have been built primarily for regionally based traffic, to the port of Warrnambool via Woolsthorpe, and between Caramut and Mortlake.

It is of scientific (technical) significance as by far the best example, in term of integrity and condition, of the few

remaining typical medium-sized simple beam-bridges, in the traditional European bridge-carpentry style, from the colonial era. It is representative of a very popular design of rural colonial Victorian timber road bridge, once common throughout Victoria's pastoral districts, but extremely rare today. Its slight hump, a technique once commonly employed to minimise floodwater damage to timber bridges, is now very rare. It is a superb intact example of traditional European bridge craftsmanship applied to Australian hardwood timber. Of particular interest are its heavy squared-timber full-caps, with ogee-shaped ends, and classical ogee shape corbels. Its short spans, and its extremely long corbels are most unusual, and have doubtless contributed to its strength and longevity compared to the many other ageing similar bridges which survived in 1913 when the Country Roads Board assumed responsibility for rural Main Road bridges. Its impression of sturdy construction is enhanced by the unusually heavy-duty squared-timber gravel beams at each kerb-side. These hand-crafted beams with neat diagonally-spliced joints were once common, but are extremely rare today. No other surviving bridge is known to retain a set of 'caps' with decorative ogee-shaped ends. Its raking or fender piles are also scarce today. It has no corbels at the abutments.

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must [notify](#) the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

### Specific Exemptions:

General Conditions:

1. All exempted plans and alterations are to be carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.
2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of alterations that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such alteration shall cease and the Executive Director shall be notified as soon as possible.
3. If there is a conservation policy or plan approved by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it.
4. Nothing in this declaration prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.

5. Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authority where applicable.

#### Specific Provisions/Exemptions

No permit is required for routine maintenance or minor repairs which replace like with like.

Construction dates	1870,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	BURCHETTS CREEK BRIDGE,
Hermes Number	5991
Property Number	

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## History

### Contextual History:History of Place:

Squatters named Henry and Charles and Fred Burchett arrived at Port Phillip in August 1839, and Henry returned to London to die there in 1872. Charles G. Burchett and his brother Fred took up 'The Gums' squatting run, six miles east of Penshurst, in December 1839. Burchett Brothers sold that squatting run in 1849, and presumably left the district. Hence the name 'Burchett' as it relates to the creek, and later to the timber bridge over the creek, belongs to the early pastoral history of the Western District. This neat and unusually well-preserved example of a medium-sized superior colonial timber-beam bridge, now unique in Victoria, would when built have been only one of many similar examples of colonial timber-beam bridge design.

The road is shown on the 1853 consolidated map of Victoria, on which, beside the Burchett Creek, are the words "Road from Portland". The original route between Melbourne and Portland passed westwards from Geelong approximately along the line of the present Hamilton Highway to Hamilton, and thence along the Henty Highway to Portland. The road also connected with Warrnambool via Caramut and Woolsthorpe. During this period however roads were mere tracks, and the main form of communication between Melbourne and Portland (and Warrnambool) was coastal shipping. The road would have carried little traffic, and even less after the impediments of the stony rises and lakes areas had been overcome, and the main road to Warrnambool became the present Princess Highway, via Terang rather than Darlington and Mortlake (then Mt Shadwell).

The Caramut - Hexham part of this "Portland Road" road, on which the bridge became an important link, was only officially declared a Main Road, and made subject to State subsidies for road and bridge works, in April 1874. This is a relatively late date in Western District and Victorian colonial history, and it may come as a surprise to modern travellers along the route of the busy Hamilton Highway.

When the Burchett Creek Bridge was most probably built, in the later 1870s, the route of our Hamilton Highway was not such a busy east-west overland route. The Western District pastoral regions still depended heavily on north-south transport routes connecting with the busy western coastal ports such as Warrnambool. A standard Railway Postal and Telegraph Map of Victoria, dated as late as 1887, indicates that the main east-west overland mail-coach route then serving Hexham and Caramut linked with Terang and Camperdown via Mortlake, rather than following the modern Hamilton Highway route through Darlington and Lismore to the north of Lake Corangamite.

Caramut township, situated close to the timber-beam Burchett Creek Bridge, was a junction town, but as late as 1894 Caramut's major roadside significance was seen to lie in its direct north-south mail-coach connection with the Port of Warrnambool via Woolsthorpe, rather than its position on the east-west road connecting with Hexham and Geelong via Mortlake. The 1894 Victorian Municipal Directory still described Caramut township as 'situated on Burchell's [sic] Creek 36 miles from Warrnambool, on main road about midway between Warrnambool and Hamilton.' Caramut township was in the Shire of Warrnambool, and the other direct north-south mail-coach route which then gave Caramut a junction-town significance was the Warrnambool-Ararat route via Caramut,

Chatsworth and Wickliffe. The 1870s bridge at Burchett's Creek probably carried more heavily-laden traffic west-bound for the Port of Warrnambool via Caramut and Woolsthorpe, than equivalent traffic heading east for Geelong or Melbourne.

Whereas many Western District roads suffered major damage to bridges during the freak floods of 1870, it appears very likely from surviving evidence at the Burchett Creek crossing that this crossing, of secondary significance in the district's arterial road system, was in 1870 still served by an unusually well-constructed ford of shaped bluestone blocks. Its recognition in 1874 as a Main Road, subject to Government subsidies, is likely to have been the stimulus for the construction of such a superior timber bridge as that existing on the road reserve today. So the Burchett's Creek Bridge is likely to be the first real bridge constructed at this site.

Victorian Public Works Department correspondence registers indicate that on 12 September, 1874, two plans and a specification relating to construction works on the Hexham-Caramut Main Road were submitted to the department. Public Works correspondence registers for 1875 indicate that considerable works were carried out on the newly declared Main Road during the early months of 1875, and Inspecting Engineer J. Crawley from Warrnambool completed inspection of some such works on 10 May, 1875. There are no direct references to the Burchett Creek Bridge in this source, and no references have been found to this bridge in a careful search of these correspondence registers up to World War One.

The Mortlake newspaper of that era is unfortunately not extant for the years between 1872 and 1877, so that 1874-75 editions cannot be checked for shire council or other reference to the works then being undertaken on the Hexham to Caramut Road. Although occasional references to Mortlake Shire affairs appear in the Warrnambool newspapers of the period, they are too sporadic to be useful in this research. Caramut township was on the northern borderlands of Warrnambool Shire, but the nearby Burchett's Creek Bridge appears to have been in Mortlake Shire, and related to that shire's efforts to upgrade the Hexham-Caramut Main Road and thus bring more traffic to Mortlake. This situation of a modest timber bridge on shire borderlands, and at a distance from the newspaper centres of Warrnambool, Hamilton and Mortlake, makes it unlikely that the local press made much fuss about its construction. The press appears to have been much more concerned about roads and bridges connecting with the southern ports.

Mortlake District Road Board was first proclaimed on 19 July 1860, and it became Mortlake Shire Council on 26 June 1864. Leading squatters of the immediate area were the Englishman Joseph Ware of Minjah and Barwidgee runs, and H. F. De Little of Caramut run. However, no extant papers relating to those properties appear available, that might have given us a clue as to the old bridge's origins. Given that initial substantial government-funded road works had commenced (probably from the Hexham end) along the new Hexham-Caramut Main Road by early in 1875, it appears most likely that the current bridge was built during that era. Burchett's Creek Bridge beside the present-day Hamilton Highway, whenever it was built, certainly has all the hallmarks of a bridge of the pre-1880 period. No other colonial timber road bridge surviving in Victoria has such well-preserved examples of ogee-shaped crosshead ends (virtually unique in Victoria today) in conjunction with the large ogee corbels which were characteristic of much traditional European bridge craftsmanship.

## **Assessment Against Criteria**

### **Criterion A.**

The historical importance, association with or relationship to Victoria's history of the place or object.

It is significant for its historical location on a crossing place on the original road between Portland and Melbourne, the two first places of permanent European settlement in Victoria.

It is significantly enhanced by having been built above the remains of a bluestone ford. The remains of the two earliest phases of stream crossing works - fords and timber bridges - at the same crossing, are rare in Victoria; the ford is probably a relic of the original works on the Portland Road.

The bridge was probably constructed in the mid-late 1870s primarily for regionally based traffic, to facilitate transport to the port of Warrnambool via Woolsthorpe, and between Caramut and Mortlake.

### **Criterion B.**

The importance of a place or object in demonstrating rarity or uniqueness.

It is by far the best example, in term of integrity and condition, of the few remaining medium-sized typical beam-bridges, in traditional European bridge-carpentry style, from the colonial era.

It is virtually the only remaining, and the most intact example, of a bridge with heavy squared-timber "full-cap" cross-beams, with ogee-shaped ends, and classical ogee shape corbels. It is unusual in that it does not have corbels to the abutments.

Its short spans, and its extremely long corbels are unusual, and have doubtless contributed to its strength and longevity compared to the many other ageing similar bridges in existence in 1913, when the Country Roads Board assumed responsibility for rural Main Road bridges.

It has unusually heavy-duty squared-timber gravel beams at each kerb-side. These hand-crafted beams with neat diagonally-spliced joints were once common, but are extremely rare today.

The humped or convex elevation of the bridge, once common, is a rare feature today. It was probably designed to facilitate the passage of floodwaters without harm to the bridge; or to produce an aesthetic effect.

Its timber raking or fender piles are now scarce.

#### Criterion C.

The place or object's potential to educate, illustrate or provide further scientific investigation in relation to Victoria's cultural heritage.

As an extremely rare, and the most intact, remaining example of a traditional colonial era all-timber bridge, it has the potential to educate, illustrate, and provide further scientific investigation in relation to Victoria's cultural heritage.

#### Criterion D.

The importance of a place or object in exhibiting the principal characteristics or the representative nature of a place or object as part of a class or type of places or objects.

It is representative of a very popular design of rural colonial Victorian timber road bridge, once common throughout Victoria's pastoral districts, but extremely rare today. It is a superb intact example of traditional European bridge craftsmanship applied to Australian hardwood timber.

#### Criterion E.

The importance of a place or object in exhibiting good design or aesthetic characteristics and/or in exhibiting a richness, diversity or unusual integration of features.

It is of aesthetic significance as a very compact, well-designed and unusually primitive timber structure set amidst rolling grasslands. It has a gently curving arch, and beautifully shaped large squared-timber corbels. As a rare exemplar of ordinary traditional colonial bridge craftsmanship, enhanced by ancient weathered timbers, it provides an exquisite scene from the adjacent highway.

Its impression of sturdy construction is enhanced by the unusually heavy-duty squared-timber gravel beams at each kerb-side.

#### Criterion F.

The importance of a place or object in demonstrating or being associated with scientific or technical innovations or achievements.

#### Criterion G.

The importance of a place or object in demonstrating social or cultural associations.

Criterion H.

Any other matter which the Council considers relevant to the demonstration of cultural heritage significance.

## **Extent of Registration**

All the bridge marked B1, including its abutments and land five metres either side of the bridge and its abutments, as marked on Diagram Number 1856 held by the Executive Director, being part of the land described as government road (Hamilton Hwy) Parish of Caramut

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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/>*