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# SUNBURY VOLUNTEER MILITARY EXERCISE SITE

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## Location

3-5 MACEDON STREET SUNBURY, HUME CITY

## Municipality

HUME CITY

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7822-2291

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO366

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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### Interpretation of Site

The site represents the 'battlefield' on which the excercises were held, the site of the encampments having been west of the siteon the other side of the creek.

The site comprises an open plain defined by Jacksons Creek to the west and steep embankments which are channelled into a gully to the east. The creek forms a deeper ravine to the north of the field. The Volunteers would proceed to this area from their encampments on the west side of the creek to undertake excercises.

The only apparent artificial feature is the zig zag track leading up a steep embankment to the north east. This was used to provide access from the camp below to the observation point on the plateau above, from which the main mock battle could be observed easily and safely.

Archaeological Significance	<p>Although the track is the only substantial relic or work which marks the place of the historic encampments in the landscape, Maloney and Johnson (1998) record that pieces of ammunition have been found in the surrounding hills. It is not clear whether these are simply the remains of cartridges dropped during manoeuvres or spent bullets. The latter would indicate that the manoeuvres included live fire exercises, in which case ordnance is likely to survive as subsurface deposits within and around the site, perhaps including larger artillery rounds. The ravine at the northern edge of the battlefield is likely to have been a safe target for practice rounds.</p> <p>It is also possible that remains survive relating to the temporary bridges constructed for the mock battles, and presumably some form of permanent crossing point allowed direct access from the camps on the western bank of the creek.</p>
Historical Significance	The site is significant for its association with the Volunteers, which were a key part of Victoria's defence capability until their disbandment in 1883. The annual encampments were the major exercise of the Volunteers, and Sunbury was one of the most suitable and frequent venues for these events.
Other Names	CANON GULLY, RUPERTSWOOD HOME PARK SITE,
Hermes Number	124590
Property Number	

## History

In 1854, at the outbreak of the Crimean War, the Victorian Volunteer Corps Act was passed. This resulted in the creation of the Melbourne Volunteer Rifle Regiment, the Victorian Volunteer Yeomanry Corps and the Geelong Rifle Corps, and in 1859 many new rifle companies and naval volunteers were authorised, including ten in the metropolitan area. General encampments were instituted, the first ones being held on the Chirnsides' property at the Werribee River, and another near Geelong. These devastated the countryside (Maloney & Johnson 1998) and Thomas Chirnsides offered the Government £2000 to hold future encampments elsewhere. In 1864, William John Turner Clarke (aka 'Big' Clarke) offered the western section of his 'home park' (later to be called Rupertswood) for the fourth annual encampment.

The purpose of the manoeuvres was to train the men in military disciplines and battle procedures. Held over six days of the Easter period, it was attended by some 2,400 volunteers, with 10-12,000 spectators observing the spectacle of the mock battle held on the Monday. One of the standard scenarios involved the retreating defenders demolishing timber Bridges, of which three, including a suspension bridge, were thrown up at each encampment, to impede the progress of the attackers. For the crowd, the artillery (in 1864 five 40 pounder Armstrongs, numerous 12 and 6 pounders, and smaller calibre guns) firing over the battleground provided a highlight of the event.

The following two Easter Volunteer Encampments were also held at the site, after which they were held at the You Yangs (1870) and Hobson's Bay (1872, 1873), but they returned to Rupertswood in 1874 and 1877. However, doubts about the efficiency of the Volunteers led to a Royal Commission in 1875 which noted inadequacies of training and other procedures and recommended their disbandment, and the Defence Reorganisation Scheme of 1883 instituted a Militia to replace the Volunteer system.

In the early years of the new century Easter military manoeuvres were again held at Sunbury, although this time they ranged more widely, and further to the north and east, which was still pastoral land in 1903.

The camp was favoured for its considerable advantages: as a suitable setting for the military manoeuvres, for its shelter to participants, and its unique viewing advantages for visitors. In 1866 the military requested spectators to

restrict themselves to the high bluff on the east side of the creek which provided a perfect view of the amphitheatre. By way of assistance, the railways constructed 'a fine bridge across the creek, and cut a zig zag path up the ascent.' (The Argus, 2/4/1866).

(Derived from Maloney & Johnson 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/>*