
Fort Queenscliff



B1849 Fortifications
Queenscliffe

Location

Gellibrand Street, QUEENSCLIFF VIC 3225 - Property No B1849

Municipality

QUEENSCLIFFE BOROUGH

Level of significance

-

Heritage Listing

Vic. War Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 22, 2005

CITATION

Included in the Classification are: 1. Walls and Keep 2. The Municipal Officers Block (former Court House, Police Station & Post Office) 3. The Signal Station 4. The Black Lighthouse 5. The Administration Block (1918) 6. The Guard Room 7. The Cell Block 8. Plaque with King Edward V1111's cypher (Engineer Barracks) The building is not included. 9. The Gorge 10. The Moat

Hermes Number 125980

Property Number

Veterans Description for Public

Fort Queenscliff, located at the corner of King and Gellibrand Streets, was developed from 1860 onwards. The fort can best be divided into eight precincts; the Seaward Defences, Landward Defences, Telegraph Station, Stores, Barracks, Guard House, Parade Ground and Education Centre. The Fort was the first and the primary defence site for Port Phillip Bay and played a command role in relation to the other fortifications around the heads of the bay. Fort Queenscliff was a key element in making the bay the most heavily defended British port in the southern hemisphere at the time. During the twentieth century, as the strategic importance of coastal defences was revised, the Fort became a central instructional college for army officers. After more than 140 years of operation the Fort continues to play a defence role.

The earliest development on the site was mainly to do with shipping into Port Phillip Bay. Several pilots' cottages were erected in 1841 and the following year a lighthouse was constructed. In the mid 1850s a telegraph station (used to transmit news of arriving ships to Melbourne) was built and it survives today within the fort as the second oldest such station in Victoria. A replacement lighthouse was erected in 1863 and it too survives today inside the fort, as do the keepers' quarters built at the same time.

Fears aroused by the Crimean War in the 1850s led to the first military development at Queenscliff. Melbourne was now a wealthy city following the gold rushes and had to be protected from potential seaborne attacks. British officer Captain (later Lieutenant Colonel) Peter Scratchley RE recommended that four forts be built near the heads of the bay, but only Queenscliff was developed at this time. In 1860 a sandstone sea wall (350mm thick) was built on Shortlands Bluff at Queenscliff, and subsequently a battery of three 68-pounder muzzle loading guns was installed above. The wall has no equivalent in Victoria and is the most substantial wall of any Scratchley fort in Australia. The guns were manned by a volunteer unit raised from the local area. There are still a dozen Gun Emplacements, dating from the late 1870s-early 1890s. These are mainly concrete and brick, with some use of bluestone, and several emplacements have bolts indicating where the guns were positioned. A restored 6-inch breech-loading gun on hydro-pneumatic mountings has been installed as well as a Nordenfeldt gun. Four restored cannon barrels have been placed outside the fort, although these emplacements are not original.

In the late 1870s Scratchley and Major General Sir William Jervois came to Australia to advise on defensive measures in a number of the colonies. In 1877 they recommended improvements at Queenscliff. Two years later the original battery was demolished and two new ones, an upper and a lower battery, were installed by 1882, at which time there were strong fears of Russian aggression. An enclosing wall and keep were begun in 1882 and completed in 1886. A dry moat was excavated the following year to run along the seaward southern boundary of the, at 3m deep and 5m. Also built was a 6 metre high, protective earth mound that provided shrapnel protection to personnel. The battery and the lighthouse precincts were by now enclosed together.

The telegraph station and keepers quarters were given over to the military, although the 1888 signal station and the lighthouse remained in civil use. The Victorian Artillery was moved permanently to Queenscliff from Melbourne. Alterations were made to the gun emplacements as the technology of weaponry continued to evolve. Defences were built at other points near the entrance to Port Phillip Bay, but Queenscliff was the most important and was the command centre for the system, hence the need for landward defences such as the wall, keep and ditch. By 1886 Port Phillip was regarded as the most heavily fortified port of the British Empire south of the equator. The Victorian Permanent Artillery remained until Federation when the Royal Australian Artillery staffed the defences.

A Directing Station, Fire Control, was built upon the earth mound 1914 to direct the firing by the fort. Then in 1915, timber barracks and mess buildings were erected. These were removed in the mid 1930s and replaced with brick buildings for the Royal Australian Artillery and the Royal Australian Engineers. In 1947 all coastal artillery was decommissioned. The previous year Fort Queenscliff had become the home to the army's Australian Staff College which it remained until 2000. During this period a number of demountable classrooms were installed, and many have since been removed. In 1982 a museum was established in the fort and tours started running for the public. Following the departure of the College, the Soldier Career Management Agency moved into part of the precinct, joining various other units. Fort Queenscliff is still owned by Defence.

The Fort Queenscliff Military Historical Society now occupies the 1887 Office associated with the Electric Engine Room; it is of brick construction. The Society's Museum is in the bomb proof Electric Engine Room built into the

protective earth mound, with a vaulted access tunnel.

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/>