

# WILLIAM RUTLEDGE AND CO. EAST BANK PRECINCT



1003 - View of south west portion of the site. Looking south east. (D. Took, 15/3/09)

William Rutledge & Co., East Bank Precinct



1004 - View of east portion of the site. Looking north west. (D. Took, 15/3/09)

William Rutledge & Co., East Bank Precinct



1005 - View of east portion of the site. Looking north east. (D. Took, 15/3/09)

William Rutledge & Co., East Bank Precinct



1006 - View of north portion of the site. Looking north west. (D. Took, 15/3/10)

William Rutledge & Co., East Bank Precinct



Ca. 1860 photograph of Port Fairy, facing NW across Moyne, showing Rutledge stores on eastern bank in foreground



Ca. 1861 photograph of Port Fairy facing NNW across the Moyne showing Rutledge's wharf and stores on western bank



1007 - View across site along Griffiths Street towards intersection with Roger Place. Looking south east. (C. Cornean, 15/3/10)

William Rutledge and Co., East Bank Precinct



1008 - View across site along Griffiths Street. Looking north. (C. Cornean, 15/3/10)

William Rutledge and Co., East Bank Precinct



William Rutledge & Co., East Bank Precinct



William Rutledge & Co., East Bank Precinct



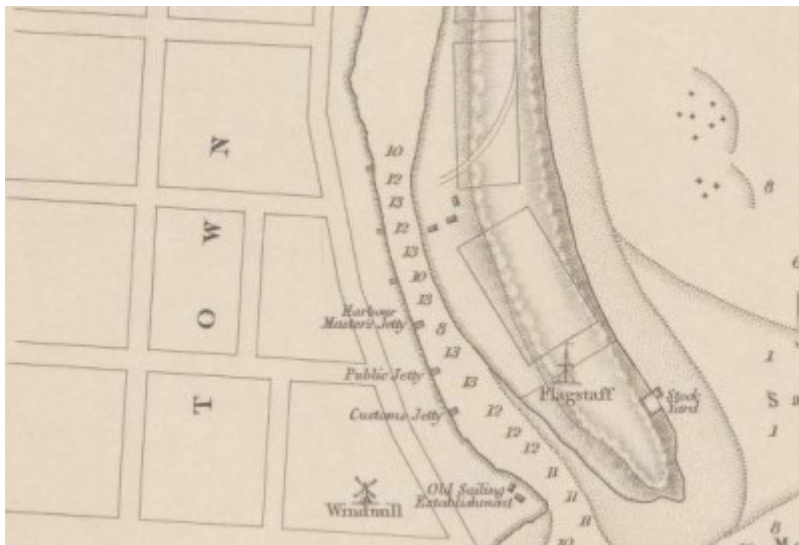
1843 surveyor's plan of Port Fairy; shows first store on the east bank of the Moyne River



1850 plan of Port Fairy township, shows store on east bank of the Moyne



1850 plan of Port Fairy showing two store buildings on eastern bank-also depicting surveyed subdivision of Belfast East.



1854 plan of Port Fairy showing three stores on east bank of the Moyne River

**Location**

52-60 GIPPS STREET PORT FAIRY, MOYNE SHIRE

**Municipality**

MOYNE SHIRE

**Level of significance**

Heritage Inventory Site

**Heritage Inventory (HI) Number**

H7321-0092

**Heritage Overlay Numbers**

HO44

**Heritage Listing**

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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**Historical  
Significance**

This site complex contains the original stores and wharf for William Rutledge & Co. They represent the first substantial attempt at developing Port Fairy as an *entrepot* for the region. In the middle decades of the 19th century, Rutledge & Co. developed into a substantial multi-faceted mercantile business supplying virtually all the needs of the growing township of Port Fairy and the surrounding agricultural and pastoral district. The company served as shipowners, importers and exporters, gold-buyers, stock and station agents, general merchants, warehouse and bulkstore operators, insurance and commission agents, wine and spirit merchants, wool and produce buyers, mail contractors and merchant bankers. Rutledge & Co. quickly expanded to one of the greatest commercial concerns in the colony of Victoria, essentially holding a monopoly over local and regional trade and contributing significantly to the growth and development of Port Fairy.

William Rutledge was also highly active in almost all town affairs in the 1840s-1850s, variously serving not only as magistrate, mayor and alderman. It has been stated that Rutledge was "inextricable entwined with the early history and prosperity of Port Fairy for he instigated many of its activities."

The site complex comprises a number of stores some of which were constructed from bluestone and at least one jetty/wharf. No features that could be associated with the 19th century remains of the site were visible. The gradual widening of Griffiths St and the excavation of the Turning Basin in 1914 has had the cumulative effect of truncating the archaeological remains of the site complex. A number of structures would have been completely removed by the construction of the Turning Basin.

#### Interpretation of Site

It would appear that the western ends of those buildings known to have been in this area have been removed from the creation of the Turning Basin. The bulk of Rutledge's two main stores however extend westwards, under Griffiths Street, with the eastern wall of the second store being situated in the Rogers Place road reserve almost level with the front fence of 32 Griffiths Street. A third building seems to lay entirely within Griffiths Street with its eastern wall being in the front yard of 32 Griffiths St. Griffiths Street itself does not appear to have been cut down providing the possibility that archaeological remains may still survive under the road base. The presence of services, such as a storm water drain, passing through the area will have reduced the integrity of the archaeological resource in this site. The slightly undulating open grassed ground between the road and the river wall is made up of sandy loam and may be dredge derived fill. This suggests that archaeological remains may have survived in this area.

Generally the archaeological remains that form this site complex have been highly impacted however there is the likelihood that strip footings of the buildings, post holes of fences and timber structures as well as surface drains and paved surfaces survive. Refuse and/or cess pits are also likely to be present.

With the regards to the jetty/wharf that forms part of the complex it appears to have been located just upstream of the Turning Basin, in the immediate vicinity of an existing jetty. It is possible at this location that the bulk of the jetty is now under reclaimed land. The pile stumps of this structure are likely to be present and associated with these structural remains would be cultural deposits formed by material being discarded from the jetty and the vessels tied up alongside.

#### Archaeological Significance

The archaeological significance of this site complex relates to what can be learned about the scale of investment that Rutledge & Co. placed in these original stores or warehouses which in turn could perhaps reflect the confidence placed in the future of Port Fairy as a major centre. Cultural deposits associated with these buildings could provide new information on the type and quality of goods being traded.

Hermes Number

156728

Property Number

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## History

In 1843, Mr. William Rutledge, land investor and developer associated with James Atkinson, arrived in Port Fairy, acquiring the 5120 acre "Farnham Special Survey" and being appointed as Atkinson's agent for the newly developing town. In ca. late 1843-early 1844, Rutledge also purchased the assets and goodwill of the only retail store in the township - belonging to Mr. John Cox - and began to develop a substantial mercantile business.

Rutledge's main business premises were located on the western bank of the Moyne River (see H7321-0093), however, he also established a supplementary cluster of stores and wharf facilities on the eastern bank.

A plan of Port Fairy dating to 1843 shows the first structure built by Rutledge on the eastern riverbank. Throughout the mid 1840s, this facility was utilised largely for receiving goods shipped down the river from establishments upstream - primarily flour turned out from the large Rosebrook Mill on the eastern bank north of the township - and thence launching whaleboats and lighters carrying produce and livestock (mustered in stockyards on the sand hummocks behind the eastern store) for export to large vessels anchored in Port Fairy bay which could not enter the Moyne River due to the sand bar at its mouth.

In 1848, Rutledge took on Lloyd, Mr. William Foster and Mr. Horace Flower as business partners and established the firm of Messrs William Rutledge & Co.

Over the following two decades, Rutledge & Co. developed into a substantial multi-faceted mercantile business supplying virtually all the needs of the growing township of Port Fairy and the surrounding agricultural and pastoral district. The company served as shipowners, importers and exporters, gold-buyers, stock and station agents, general merchants, warehouse and bulk-store operators, insurance and commission agents, wine and spirit merchants, wool and produce buyers, mail contractors and merchant bankers. Rutledge & Co. quickly expanded to one of the greatest commercial concerns in the colony of Victoria, essentially holding a monopoly over local and regional trade and contributing significantly to the growth and development of Port Fairy.

William Rutledge was also highly active in almost all town affairs in the 1840s-1850s, variously serving not only as magistrate, mayor and alderman. It has been stated that Rutledge was "inextricably entwined with the early history and prosperity of Port Fairy for he instigated many of its activities." As the company grew and wharf and store facilities expanded, it appears that Rutledge was desirous of developing the eastern store to provide more direct services to the public. In 1849, he began petitioning the Government to provide funding to construct a bridge across the Moyne River thus linking his two stores, maintaining that it was a "most shameful neglect" on behalf of the government "in not having long ere this, built a bridge between the door of my store on the Belfast side of the river, and the door of my other store on the hummock side." In order to tempt others to support his cause, Rutledge offered that if the bridge were built, he would permit local residents to cross the bridge free of charge every Sunday "to take the air on the sea beach" - as long as, of course, said residents dealt exclusively at his stores; those who dealt with his competitors would be charged a toll. Government assistance was finally provided for the construction of a bridge in 1852, however, the selected location was at the northern extent of Gipps Street, crossing the bend of the Moyne in a NE-SW orientation; unfortunately for Rutledge, not linking his two stores.

Plans of Port Fairy show that the complex on the eastern bank had been expanded to include two structures by 1850 and three by 1854. Photographs dating to the early 1860s depict one central building with stone chimneys and several timber sheds and stores, fenced in. Some secondary sources state that by the late 1850s-early 1860s, there were twelve structures in William Rutledge & Co.'s store complex on the east bank.

In the early 1860s, Rutledge & Co., began to run into trouble; not due to negligence or mismanagement but rather a result of developing strong competition for trade. A power struggle had begun with various Victorian pastoral, banking, mercantile, agricultural, mining, manufacturing and other interests attempting to gain economic advantage; yet the substantial business of Rutledge & Co. and its monopoly of much of the south-west region was something stood in the way. Rutledge & Co. had largely operated on advance and credit systems and in a few short years, rival companies and organisations accumulated the firms credit or "payment on demand" notes and insisted upon immediate cash payment. Rutledge himself was, during this time, attending to financial negotiations in England and upon his return found the company highly in debt and unable to be recovered. In June 1862, Rutledge & Co. filed for voluntary insolvency at a deficiency of £54,668 (liabilities declared at £177,508 and assets of only £112,840). By 1866, all creditors were paid but the fall of the company had a devastating effect on the township of Port Fairy, including significant local financial depression and the transference of much regional business and trade to other townships.

Following the bankruptcy of the company, Rutledge & Co's property on the western bank of the Moyne River were sold; details regarding the disposal of the property and structures on the eastern bank, however, are unknown. It appears that the stores were largely allowed to fall into disrepair. The land along the eastern bank of the Moyne, later known as Belfast East, had surveyed, subdivided and offered for sale in the early 1850s, however very few allotments were sold and most of those were purchased by speculators. By the 1860s, Borough rate records indicate that only twenty-two structures were present along the isthmus - it appears that the sandy nature of the landscape, exposure to the bay and the continued lack of public infrastructure made Belfast East a generally unfavourable location for occupation.

By the 1880s, it would appear that Rutledge's store facilities on the eastern bank of the Moyne had been removed. Plans and sketches dating to this period show no structures along the riverbank and as residential occupation slowly increased at Belfast East, streets were formed and the alignment of the major north-south roadway, Griffiths Street, gazetted as a road in 1883, passes directly through the location of Rutledge's stores.

*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/>*