
FORMER MERRIJIG INN SITE

Location

18-20 GIPPS STREET PORT FAIRY, MOYNE SHIRE

Municipality

MOYNE SHIRE

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7321-0077

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Interpretation of Site

The premises of 18 and 20 Gipps St appear to have low impact footings on the basis they being timber structures. The surrounding grounds do not appear to have been heavily modified. The buildings on 22 Gipps St and 9 Terjesen Crt occupy a large proportion of their allotments and having brick or stone footings will have impacted earlier remains more substantially than the timber dwellings on 18 and 20 Gipps St. According to the historical overlays part of the building extends onto Gipps St. The road appears to have been cut down into the original ground surface at this location however the grassed reserve between the gutter and the property boundaries slopes up slightly to the west indicating that original ground levels have been retained. The archaeological remains of the Merrijig Inn would be mostly post holes associated with the Inn, stables, outhouses and fencing. There would also be refuse pits present on the site.

Archaeological Significance	As the earliest public inn at Port Fairy, the archaeological significance of this site lies in its ability to inform us of the services. In terms of range and quality, such as food, drink and accommodation, that the Inn provided to those working at the whaling station and those very early pioneers to the district. The archaeological remains of the Merrijig Inn would be mostly post holes associated with the Inn, stables, outhouses and fencing. There would also be refuse pits present on the site.
Historical Significance	The Merrijig Inn was the first hotel in Port Fairy and would have been the focal point for the nascent community for a few years.
Other Names	COX STORE AND McNEIL'S INN, OLD/ORIGINAL MERRIJIG INN SITE,
Hermes Number	162617
Property Number	

History

During the late 1830s and early 1840s, sealers and whalers were operating from Griffith Island and a handful of settlers were occupying agricultural land in the area that was soon to become part of the James Atkinson's Belfast Special Survey and the township of Port Fairy. While the exact number of settlers is not known, available information shows that occupancy preceding the survey certainly included the store of Mr. John Cox and farms operated by Charles Mills, Michael Connolly, John Griffiths and Alexander Campbell.

Accounts of Port Fairy dating to mid 1843 - early 1844 describe the settlement as including Cox's store, the Merrijig Inn (both marked on the above plan) and a number of widely scattered and irregularly placed private dwellings of various kinds and sizes; in early 1843, this number was ca. twelve-fifteen. These structures were mostly of small dimensions and "economical construction", mostly built of timber - either sawn or hewn, or wattle and daub, with a small number of stone houses.

The Merrijig Inn was the first public house established in the settlement at Port Fairy, with a licence to operate a hotel being granted in 1842 to Mr. Archibald McNeil - previously an overseer on Alexander Campbell's cattle run. An 1843 plan of Port Fairy depicts the structure, situated on the western bank of the Moyne River, well to the south of the main cluster of residences.

By 1844-1845, the Merrijig was described as a weatherboard inn, consisting of "five or six small apartments" with outhouses and "stabling for a few horses." It was still the only place where the sale of "fermented and spirituous liquors" was allowed. However, not long after, a second hotel was being established by Mr. Cronin just to the northwest of the Merrijig. This hotel was a much more substantial construction and upon completion was a two-storey stone building. Possibly indicative of a highly competitive nature, Cronin not only built his hotel very near to the Merrijig, but he also decided to name his establishment the "Merrijig Inn." Shortly thereafter, McNeil's establishment became known as the "Old Merrijig Inn" and Cronin's as the "Royal Merrijig Inn."

When the township of Port Fairy was surveyed and major thoroughfares pegged out during the mid-late 1840s, the "Old Merrijig Inn" fell across the southern end of Gipps Street and within Lot 4 of Gipps Street, acquired by Mr. W. J. Middleton. It appears that the inn was modified to be included within the allotment and may have continued to operate under management of Mr. Middleton; no records appear to exist that detail the hotel's demolition. It is likely, however, that the building did not continue to operate as a public house for much longer as no further references to it as a hotel are found. This is perhaps not surprising given the strong and very near competition. An 1870 surveyor's plan of Port Fairy depicts a single structure in this allotment, seemingly fronting Gipps Street; this may represent a modified version of McNeil's "Old Merrijig." In the 1890s, the allotment was divided and sold and it seems apparent that by this time, the "Old Merrijig" had been removed.

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/>