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# DOBSON'S COBB & CO. STABLES

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## Location

WESTERN HIGHWAY BURRUMBEET, BALLARAT CITY

## Municipality

BALLARAT CITY

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7623-0321

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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### Interpretation of Site

The site's function as stables that served horse-drawn traffic on the Ballarat to Stawell route is known from written and material evidence. The stables date from after the establishment of Burrumbeet township in 1855 (Watson 2003, 73). They probably continued to operate into the early 20th century, after which they were used as a barn to shelter livestock. Standing structures display at least three phases of architectural alterations and use of different materials: (1) A rectangular substructure (21 m x 9 m) of sandstone blocks and mortar with a wooden gable roof. The ground floor, on its longer, southern side, has an entrance and two windows; an upper storey loft has two small windows. (2) West of the sandstone building, a second building was added, which is a low, single-storey barn adjoined to the western end of the primary structure at a right angle, on a north-south alignment (22 m). Two types of basalt (porous basalt and bluestone) and wood are the main materials. The same basalt was used for buttresses at the eastern and western end of the sandstone building, indicating the sandstone's poor quality and the need to shore up the structure. (3) Various later repairs and maintenance including the use of brick to replace damaged masonry, re-pointing mortar, roofing.

Archaeological Significance

The stables complex has medium to high archaeological significance on the basis of its preservation and in relation to comparable sites. Though there are better preserved examples of coaching stables (e.g. standing Cobb & Co. station at Buangor), the Burrumbeet site retains much of its original form, shows the use of local materials in a vernacular style and displays different stages of alterations and additions. Alterations reflect the site's use, upkeep and expansion and responses to structural problems, particularly the poor-quality sandstone. Besides the main structures, other intact features include paved courtyards, post holes and window frames; plentiful artefacts (19th-century bottles, ceramics, metal etc.) are within the walls of the sandstone building. The complex spans an area of about 0.2 ha (70 m x 30 m). The site's social and functional significance lies in its use as a stopping point on a major communications route, particularly during the gold rush years of the third quarter of the 19th century. It is the only stone building in Burrumbeet. The site is an important example of 19th-century transport infrastructure.

The intact architecture, plentiful in situ features and abundant surface artefacts mean that the site has medium to high scientific and archaeological value. There is a high likelihood of preserved archaeological deposits. The different phases of use evident from architectural alterations have scientific interest, especially the usage of different local building materials and the architectural traditions displayed in the two standing structures.

The site is the only remaining stone structure of the 19th century in Burrumbeet, and the use of stone rather than wood across most of the structures is noteworthy.

See site card attached for more information on the construction technique used to construct the building.

Historical Significance

The site has high historical significance as a major feature of the Burrumbeet area. Nowadays, the ruins are the most prominent surviving landmark of the Victorian period. Historical and archaeological information prove the site's use as stables during the second half of the 19th century and probably into the 20th century, and its use as a barn in the 20th century. The stables were a component of the transport and communication infrastructure of western Victoria, serving coaches and travellers along the Ballarat to Stawell route. The stables were constructed by Henry and Isabella Dobson, important figures in Burrumbeet's early history, who arrived in the district in 1855, the year that Burrumbeet was established (Watson 2003, 73). The site is closely associated with the Picnic Hotel and Dobson family residence on the south side of the highway.

Other Names DOBSON'S STABLES, COBB AND CO. RUINS,

Hermes Number 162807

Property Number

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## History

The stables served as a changing post for coaches and other traffic along the route between Ballarat and Stawell. According to a local history of Burrumbeet "Such changing points were established about every 23 kilometres along the route. Every day horse teams would pass through the town as they took timber and firewood to the gold mines at various locations around Ballarat and probably the men in charge would stop at the hotel for 'refreshments'" (James 2007, 12).

The site was established by Henry Dobson, whose hotel and residence (the Picnic Hotel) were situated on the opposite, southern side of the road. Dobson arrived in the Burrumbeet area in 1855 (James 2007, 12).

The stables were located near the Burrumbeet toll gate, operated by the Ballarat and District Road Board, which collected payment from road users to assist with the maintenance and upgrade of local roads (James 2007, 9). The stables were probably used by the Cobb & Co. transportation company which was established in 1853 and expanded under James Rutherford and partners in 1861. It is not known exactly what date the stables were built or when they continued to operate until, though after the end of horse-drawn transport they were probably used as barns to shelter livestock until quite recently. There might also have been a reduction in horse-drawn traffic following the construction of the Ballarat to Ararat railway line and the opening of Burrumbeet station in 1874. The buildings' roofs were in place in the mid-1960s or 70s, and their collapse hastened the disintegration of walls, with the collapse of two walls on the north and west of the building probably dating from the last ten years.

*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/>*