

FORMER ARMSTRONG PRIMARY SCHOOL SITE

Location

11 MILITARY BYPASS ROAD ARMSTRONG, ARARAT RURAL CITY

Municipality

ARARAT RURAL CITY

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7423-0083

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Archaeological Significance	The survey did not locate structural evidence, resulting in the assessment of low archaeological significance, however there is low-moderate archaeological potential for sub surface remains to be present.
Historical Significance	Of local historical significance for its association with the gold rush. May have archaeological potential.
Interpretation of Site	The small township of Armstrong lay within a significant gold mining district, between the best known diggings of Ararat and Stawell. Although little history is available on the actual history of the school site it is likely to represent a single-classroom with one locally resident teacher.
Hermes Number	191887
Property Number	

History

Armstrong School

The area of Armstrong takes its name from one of the most renowned pioneering sheep farmers in Victorian history. John Armstrong was a member of a very old Scottish Border family of that name, and came out from Scotland arriving in Port Phillip in 1839. He had married in Scotland on 27th February, 1829, Vair Scott, a connection of Sir Walter Scott, the great Scottish novelist. He was accompanied by his wife and four sons - William, Robert Grieve, Thomas and John; also one daughter, Jemima Scott. Another son was born during the voyage out. On arrival at Port Phillip, John Armstrong, who had brought some stock out with him, took up Bush Station, also known as River Station, which included the site of the present city of Geelong, and it is said that the homestead was situated where Geelong College now stands. The original station extended as far as Barwon Heads and Torquay.

John Armstrong had come from a family that had been engaged in sheep farming in Scotland for generations, and possessed all the knowledge necessary about stock, particularly sheep. This knowledge no doubt accounted for his success as a pioneer pastoralist in Victoria. He was for many years recognized as the most perfect sheep master in Victoria, and was the first to adopt the well known remedy for dipping sheep to cure scab and all insect pests. When the town of Geelong took shape, portion of the rights of Bush run were cancelled, but John Armstrong later obtained further grazing rights at Black Forest, formerly Werribee Plains, in 1850. He also held Allanvale or Sinclair's Station, 80,000 acres, near Great Western, from 1854-57, and when gold was discovered in the latter year, he had about 30,000 sheep being shepherded in the vicinity of the diggings. Several Highland families which John Armstrong had brought out from Scotland were working for him on Allanvale, and despite the lure of the goldfields, remained loyal to their employer and did their utmost to prevent the dispersal of his flocks by the diggers, but it was a hopeless task, the flocks having to be moved further out (*The Pastoral Times*, Deniliquin, June 23, 1939).

Residential settlement at Armstrong was largely a result of gold discovery in the district (Noble, Kiddell and Clarke 2008). One of the earliest was in 1855 by a group of miners, who made discoveries at Garden Gully and Eaglehawk Leads 'on Armstrong's Run' (Banfield 1986). By 1857 Armstrong's had two other diggings in operation; Dutton's Gully and Long Gully 'about five miles north of Ararat' (Banfield 1986). After the initial finds of 1855, Armstrong's was alternately 'rushed and deserted' (Banfield 1986). In 1861 there was estimated to be about 200 Europeans and 150 Chinese working the area (Banfield 1986). Such large numbers of people passing through the town would have caused considerable damage to the roads, and in 1862 a toll bar was erected to finance road maintenance and improvements (Noble, Kiddell and Clarke 2008). When miners heard of a lucky strike at Armstrong's in 1864, three or four hundred converged on the dormant town, once again bringing it back to life. Bailliere's Gazetteer described Armstrong's in 1865 as a 'postal mining village' situated on the 'E. Black' range. At that time this 'alluvial mining' town contained two breweries, a railway station and a population of 120. The closest hotel was stated to be at Great Western. Armstrong lay within a significant gold mining district, between the best known diggings of Ararat and Stawell.

The Armstrong School

Schooling in the Ararat-Stawell district appears to have been somewhat paltry, even by the standards of the day. In 1873, a Mr Holland, dux of Melbourne University Classics, took up the post of inspector for the Ararat District - which extended north and westwards to include nearly a quarter of Victoria. He depicted the local conditions he encountered thus:

"There were groups of schools around Ararat, Stawell, St. Arnaud, and Beaufort, and a string of schools between Skipton and Apsley - more string than schools." (Sweetman *et al* 1922).

Little is available on the history of this school. Given the small population of Armstrong through most of the 19th century it is unlikely to have comprised more than a single-classroom with one locally resident teacher. Banfield (1986: 79) notes that between the Great Western Gold rush in 1858 and its decline in 1859 'The Armstrongs schoolteacher arrived, bringing his school building with him'. This would indicate that the original school structure was a transient or lightly constructed building. At this stage in Victorian history prior to the Education Act of 1872, such schools would not have functioned as State, but rather common or private institutions. Elsewhere however, Banfield (1964) indicates that a school opened in the town in 1865 and its first teacher was GS Mason - this school being closed before March 1949 (Banfield, 1964). These reports may not be contradictory, as given the likely transient nature of the school initiated in 1858-9, this building and its school-teacher proprietor may have moved from the district. In contrast to many country schools which are frequently noted in contemporaneous newspapers as venues of community meetings and functions, the Armstrong school is notably scarcely

mentioned. The *Argus* of 19th July 1865 notes in its Government Gazette section:

"The following gentlemen have been appointed by the Board of Education members of the Local Committees of the undermentioned Common Schools, without prejudice to the power of the board to withdraw aid from the school at any time, subject to the provisions of the act. Armstrong's School (No. 784 (1 ?)) William Lane Brine, John Whitten, James Smith, John Trotter, and John Thomas Coates. The Ararat Advertiser of 12 June 1867 contains an announcement placed by John Kofoed for a 'grand evening of entertainment' to be held at Bruce's Hotel, in aid of the local school. The *Argus* of 8th November 1933 listed that "Mr. E. Felsher, from Moe has commenced duty in charge of the Armstrong's school"

It is possible that the school at Armstrong / Armstrong's may have been referred to by a different title than 'Armstrong's' , given that in 1855 the first school to open in the Werribee area was (Miss) Armstrong's, usually referred to as Armstrong's School- a prominent institution which grew substantially to become the current Werribee State School 649. The location of the Armstrong's School can be seen in figure 1, to the east of the Western Highway in the top left of the following extract from the 1875 Victorian Mines Department Armstrong Map.

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/>