
WANGARATTA RAILWAY STATION ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMPLEX

Location

37 NORTON STREET, WANGARATTA VIC 3677

Municipality

WANGARATTA RURAL CITY

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H8125-0037

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - March 4, 2021

The Wangaratta Railway Station is historically significant for its associations with the steam era, the water tower serving as an important reminder of this. The large four-storey brick water supply system is significant as a substantially intact example of the large railway water towers constructed during the late 19th century to facilitate the operation of the steam engines. It is also significant for its associations with the 'light lines' era (c.1869 - c.1884).

Archaeological remains of the former extensive steam era facilities are an important record of the predominant period of the station's operations and potentially give insight into the technology, historical development and social significance of the station and North East Railway generally.

Nineteenth century remains relating to the steam era of locomotive haulage rarely survives in Victoria, apart from

an occasional water tower. The coaling, watering and ash removal functions of steam main line railway activities are poorly understood. Similarly the safe-working systems are now obsolete, and apart from reconstructed heritage tourist railways such as Puffing Billy, or fragments such as along the Upfield Rail line, little is known of the actual fabric of steam era safe-working systems. Wangaratta station and goods yard, having been a particularly complex facility, which while having had much of the original above ground infrastructure removed, has not been subject to the level of disturbance of most other similar Melbourne or regional stations, and therefore has a high potential for such archaeological remains to be present.

Interpretation
of Site

The area within the Wangaratta Railway Station yards was originally subdivided for residential blocks but was resumed for railway construction in the 1860s (Honman, Paul, & Helms 2013). However, it is unlikely that these blocks were occupied prior to the construction of the railway. Current structures of the Wangaratta Station and surrounds are protected on the Victorian Heritage Register. Within the registered area, both standing structures and any buried structural and artefact remains are contributory to the significance of the place. Together they represent the recognised heritage values and potential further values. There are however, several extant features and the sites of former structures outside the VHR listed extent which are also of significance to understanding the railway development. Some of these such as the remnant tracks, signals, points, culverts and footings are visible, others are potential archaeological remains. As facilities become redundant or are moved with expansion of the lines, it was common practice to only remove the structure down to the permanent way level and cover over with earth or ballast (note the permanent way is the levelled earthworks comprising cuttings and embankments on which the railway is constructed, ballast, sleepers rails, signalling and other structures are then constructed upon the permanent way). Therefore the archaeological remains of many structures are likely to remain in place. The existing VHR listing for the Wangaratta Railway Station Complex refers to it as highly intact to its mid-late nineteenth century appearance with some alterations, but retaining a high level of historical integrity. The significant elements identified in the Victorian Heritage Register or comprising built structures associated with the significant place include the following:

- Original 1870s brick and stone edged passenger platforms, including carriage dock platforms at the north and south ends of the station, highly intact to its 1870s configuration.
- Substantial, predominantly single storey, bi-chromatic brick station building with a two-storey section with hipped roofs, altered internally and with later extension to the east, some minor former timber out-buildings have been removed.
- Circular water tower with four-level brick base and cast iron water supply tank, highly intact to original design.
- Water column or water crane at north end of platform for filling steam engine tenders – previously located with an elevated water tank at south end of platform. Intact but inoperable.
- Timber and corrugated iron goods shed and platform, intact.
- Goods yard crane north of goods shed, a timber signal box, rare and highly intact of once common railway yard feature.
- 1880s footbridge with riveted steel trusses and piers and later timber ramps, intact to the extent of the main steel trusses and piers, approach ramps have been reconstructed at least twice, having replaced former steps and then reconfigured to extend over wider rail yards and shifted to accommodate Standard Gauge line works.
- 1906 footbridge, heavily altered from its original timber truss form to steel girder spans and timber ramps.
- Riveted steel semaphore signal gantry, very rare and highly intact.
- Small early twentieth century corrugated iron gangers hut near signal gantry. Other features, predominantly of an archaeological nature that contribute to the historical significance of the Wangaratta Station Complex are as follows:
- Minor signal and track elements such as brick bases of former signals, incomplete and redundant components scattered around former sidings and rail yards.
- Native and planted trees, evidently mostly of recent origin although large lemon scented gums may have been planted as part of 1950s Standard Gauge works.
- Former narrow gauge rail lines to south of station, including connections to transfer platforms at west end of yard, tracks to dual gauge turntable, and sidings extending to east end of station near 'motor sheds' these were located between the station and existing tracks on the north and the 'dive' on the south.
- 1950s-60s Standard Gauge line works including the 'Dive', southern platform and grade separation at Green Street intact to original configuration, with only new passenger shelter and signage.
- Rail sidings and permanent ways, including Whitty's silos and site of 1880 flour mill.
- Incomplete scattered components and ground features representing former extent and complexity of sidings and rail yards including footings and culverts for former signal gantries, points, signals and couplings.
- One Mile Creek rail bridge. This is outside the VHR extent, but includes contemporary 1870s components as well as elements constructed in the 1920s and 1950s for line upgrades.
- Locomotive ash pits beneath the rail tracks, coaling station and gangers' facilities and other cabins, to the east of Green Street overpass.
- Locomotive turntables to the west of the Green Street overpass.
- The "Workmasters Yard", comprising a number of corrugated iron structures on the north side of the rail lines east of the Green Street overpass.
- The previous goods shed location extending about 15 metres south of the present goods shed.
- Elevated water tank and water crane, water pipes at the south end of the existing platform.
- Coal store located north of the main tracks just east of the Cusack St footbridge. The locations of the potential archaeological remains and visible structures were determined by overlaying historical maps and plans of the station yard and then assessing levels and likely disturbance from more recent construction, excavation and landform changes. For example the area south west of the green st overpass has been raised up, potentially burying any underlying features. Similarly the rail yards have remained at the same level – determined by the need to

History

In 1863, a petition that called for the Government to build a railway from Sandhurst to Albury was proposed by the citizens of Wangaratta and Chiltern (Ward 1988, p. 27). The proposed location of the Wangaratta Railway Station resulted in the rearrangement of a number of subdivisions of the 1850s and 1860s to accommodate the diagonal permanent alignment (Honman, Paul, & Helms 2013). The North-Eastern Railway Act authorising construction of a main trunk line of railway was passed in 1869 (Ward 1988, p. 29).

Originally, the Wangaratta Railway Station comprised a temporary station, a goods shed and a water supply, built in 1873 (Ward 1988, p. 72). The North-Eastern Railway line between Benalla and Wangaratta was opened for traffic on 28 October 1873, and the Wangaratta to Wodonga line was opened on 21 November 1873 (Honman, Paul, & Helms 2013). This is depicted on a centenary commemoration plaque at Wangaratta Railway Station. Located on the western side of Docker Street (adjacent to where Wangaratta Railway Station now stands) is the Docker Street West Precinct, which features a series of buildings that have had some connection with the Railway or nearby Wangaratta Hospital or both (Honman, Paul, & Helms 2013). No buildings within this precinct predate the Railway and include the North Eastern Hotel (built soon after the station), a small cottage possibly built for railway workers, a series of cottages along Cusack Street and a 'Spanish Mission' villa opposite the Hospital which now serves as doctors' consulting rooms (Honman, Paul, & Helms 2013).

The temporary station building was subsequently replaced with a permanent polychrome brick structure designed by Thomas Higginbotham, built 1874-1875 (Ward 1988, p. 31). The signal box was built in 1887 and extended in 1908 (Zweep & Seawright 2019, p. 48). The Cusack Street footbridge was designed in 1888, according to railway plans. In 1906, the Cusack Street footbridge was subject to alteration designs associated with the elevation. The Docker Street footbridge was subject to alterations in 1908 and 1919, according to railway plans. On 14 March 1899, the Wangaratta to Whitfield narrow-gauge line was opened ('The Whitfield Narrow Gauge

Railway', 1901). The terminus was located on the Norton Street frontage of the main station building (Zweep & Seawright 2019, p. 48). The development of the station and the various branch lines meant that the Wangaratta goods yards were very

busy in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Wangaratta was the junction for branch lines to a number of surrounding towns. They included; the 5' 3" broad gauge Yackandandah and Bright – Beechworth lines and a narrow gauge 2' 6" Whitfield railway line. A short, broad gauge branch line ran west to a wheat silo located on the north side of the Ovens River at Boorhaman.

In 1957, the 4' 8" standard gauge line was planned to be laid through Wangaratta, necessitating the construction of a road underpass at Rowan Street, a cutting bypassing the station, and an overpass near Roy Street (Honman, Paul, & Helms 2013). Aerial imagery from 1961 demonstrates the location of the planned underpass at Rowan Street and the cutting bypassing the station. This bypass or 'Dive' cutting alongside the station and adjacent Norton Street included the construction of a small passenger platform (Zweep & Seawright 2019, p. 48). In 1962 the standard gauge line was built through Wangaratta Railway Station. The broad gauge line at Wangaratta station was in use up until 2011, when it was subsequently disconnected (Zweep & Seawright 2019, p. 48).

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/>