
CUT PAW PAW SANITORIUM

Location

KOROROIT CREEK ROAD, ALTONA NORTH VIC 3025

Municipality

HOBSONS BAY CITY

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7822-2403

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - March 25, 2021

The Cut Paw Paw Sanitorium in Williamstown North (part of the ExxonMobil Altona Refinery, Altona North) contains the archaeological remains of the former Cut Paw Paw Sanitorium.

The Cut Paw Paw Sanitorium for infectious diseases was established in 1882. The site allocated by the Victorian government was established to deal with outbreaks of imported diseases into Melbourne including variola (smallpox). In 1884, an outbreak of smallpox spurred the government to expand the Sanitorium with the construction of semi-permanent infrastructure and facilities to support the operation. By the late 1890s the Sanitorium had fallen into disrepair and by 1901 the Cut Paw Paw facility was closed, with patients transferred to a replacement hospital on Coode Island. The former Sanitorium cemetery was removed by 1930s, but it wasn't until 1957 that the 'Old Werribee Cemetery' was officially discontinued under Section 42 of the Cemeteries Act 1928.

Archaeological features include the identification of subsurface historical humans. At the time of writing, one (1) set of historical human remains has been visually identified. The desktop background review indicates that there is the possibility for more bodies to be identified subsurface. Three headstones were noted to be present in the early twentieth century.

The site has the potential to provide information about early examples of infectious disease control in Victoria and burial practices.

How is it significant?

The site is of archaeological, historical and scientific significance at a Local level.

Why is it significant?

The site is significant at a local level for the following reasons:

The Cut Paw Paw Sanitorium is archaeologically significant because of its potential to yield information regarding the preparation of deceased in times of viral outbreaks and associated burial practices. It is of historical and scientific significance because of its associations with Melbourne’s early response to viral outbreaks. Specifically, the preparation of deceased individuals who have died due to viral conditions including smallpox and the bubonic plague.

Interpretation
of Site

In 1882 the Victorian Government allocated approximately 50 acres of land for the development of a sanitorium. Several permanent buildings where erected on the 50 acres but most buildings at the time were make-shift structures (tents). In july 1882, five acres of the sanitorium allotment were allocated as the sanitoriums dedicated graveyard. The sanitorium functioned up until 1901 when it was discontinued in lieu of newer purpose built sanitorium/quarantine facilities built in Melbourne. The sanitorium/graveyard was largely forgotten until a survey in 1927 reidentified three graves/headstones. By the 1930 the sanitorium seems to have disappeared from Parish and Ordinance maps. By 1957 the sanitorium graveyard was officially discontinued by section 42 of the Cemeteries Act 1928. Its discontinuation correlates to the expansion of the Altona Refinery to adjacent properties. The North Crude Tank Farm (where the site is located) was developed from the early 1960’s. The North Crude Tank Farm has a high level of development and includes utilities, gravel access roads and storage tanks. These assets sit atop the proposed boundary of the Cut Paw Paw Sanitorium. The North Crude Tank farm is still currently in use.

Hermes
Number

207043

Property
Number

History

Sanitorium and Cemetery

In 1882 a Sanitorium for infectious diseases, including smallpox, was established in Altona. The need for the sanitorium was spurred by outbreaks of imported disease, such as measles, smallpox and scarlet fever, which saw high death rates in the cramped living quarters of Melbourne city. In 1882, the government allocated approximately 50 acres of land to the Department of Health to establish the sanitorium. The site became known as the ‘Cut Paw Paw Sanitorium’ (Figure 4). 1884 saw a new smallpox outbreak spread within Melbourne. Infected persons were quarantined at the Cut Paw Paw Sanitorium. An article in ‘*The Argus*’ from Thursday 10 July relates to a committee meeting from the day between “a number of gentlemen connected with the boards of

health in and around the metropolis” who gathered to discuss a memo from the Central Board of Health from July 7, 1884, which is titled ‘Sanitorium – Necessary Improvements’ (*The Argus*, 1884, July 10: 10). The memo reads: *Adverting to the fact that there are now four patients together with their necessary medical and other attendants, at the Sanitorium, Cut-paw paw, I am instructed to inform you that the Central Board deem it absolutely necessary that further additions and improvements should at once be made to the station. The board estimate that these improvements will amount to £350.* Two weeks later, on Monday 28 July, an article in *The Age* indicated that the additional infrastructure requested by the Central Board of Health was approved and swiftly implemented at the sanitorium (*The Age*, 1884, July 28: 5).

The article opens:

The small-pox patients at the sanitorium at Cut paw-paw continue to make steady progress towards recovery. One of the two cottages, which it was decided should be erected in order to provide additional accommodation for patients, has been finished. The contractor has been instructed to proceed at once with the erection of quarters for the doctor and the caretaker, and when these are completed, the building now allotted to those officers will be available as a convalescent ward.

These quarters are visible in two photographs of the sanitorium, which date from between 1884 – ca. 1900 which show a number of wooden buildings at the site (Figure 5 and Figure 6). The July 28 article in *The Age* also shows that the need for a cemetery associated with the sanitorium was recognised by the Central Board of Health. The Central Board of Health had previously requested that land associated with a military reserve at Williamstown be used for the cemetery. This request was denied; however, the land was instead excised from the property already slated for sanitorium use. The article states that:

The Central Board of Health has received a communication from the Lands Department stating that the request of the board that five acres of the military reserve at Williamstown should be excised and handed over to the board as a cemetery in connection with the sanitorium, cannot be complied with. The board has, therefore, decided to set apart for cemetery purposes four or five acres belonging to the Sanitorium.

Parish plans from this period show that the cemetery was established in the north western extent of the land occupied by the Board of Central Health (Figure 7). This plan also clearly identifies the 50 acres purchased by the Department of Health. Although the location of the cemetery is well documented in plans of the Cut Paw Paw parish, the precise location of the sanitorium itself is less clear. By all accounts, the sanitorium facility was confined to a small portion of the 50 acre property on which it was located. A description of the sanitorium from 1894 describes the buildings as the ‘north, west and south the Sanitorium [sic] was bounded by an old creek choked with rotting vegetation, while on the east side, a filthy fever-reeking swamp encroached and added to its dismalness’. Despite the upgrades to the sanitorium in the mid-1880s, it seems that maintenance of the facility was not given priority by the General Board of Health. A visiting doctor to the site in 1894 describing the sanitorium wrote:

The huts which serve as wards are altogether unsuitable for personal suffering from any form of disease, being exceedingly draughty; not admitting of being maintained at even tolerably uniform temperature, and being exposed continuously to found and, in wet weather, to damp soil air from beneath the flooring boards. Moreover, there is no proper arrangement for bathing or for cooking. In fact, the conditions at this establishment are unfavourable to recovery... The want of a properly drained exercising ground for the convalescents has a markedly depressing influence upon them. And the insufficiency of the fencing around the establishment, as also the unsatisfactory conditions under which the caretaker has hitherto been allowed to continue in the cottage, provide means whereby infection may at any time be transmitted from the buildings... (Williamstown Chronicle 1894, June 2: p. 2).

By the late 1890s, the sanitorium had fallen into disrepair and was argued as being an unsafe and improper quarantine environment, reported as being in ‘a most dilapidated and insanitary condition’ (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 1897, June 14: p. 5). In June 1897, it was identified that the costs associated with the repair of the facility would be in the sum of £5000. So unequipped was the facility, that it was recommended that rather than investing in the sanitorium that in the event of an outbreak ‘the warship *Nelson* be used as a smallpox hospital’ (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 1897, June 14: p. 5).

Despite the poor state of the sanitorium, a number of patients were transferred to the facility in 1901 following an outbreak of smallpox in the city. The same year, however, between September and November, the Cut Paw Paw facility was announced to be discontinued, to be replaced with a purpose-built facility on Coode Island, which had an established hospital used to treat people infected with the bubonic plague (*The Ballarat Star* 1901, September 28: p. 1; *The Argus* 1901, November 20: p. 8). Although ‘abolished’, the facility must have remained at least partly

functional until 1904, with reports of a man being moved from Melbourne Hospital to the Cut Paw Paw Sanatorium to be cremated in March 1904 (*Bendigo Advertiser* 1904, March 19: p. 5).

Following the discontinuation of the sanatorium, structures at the site appear to have been swiftly dismantled, and the sanatorium and the associated cemetery seemingly forgotten. Nearly three decades later, in 1927, a group of land surveyors identified 'a small forgotten cemetery surrounded by barbed wire fencing and overgrown with weeds' (*The Age* 1929, June 22: p. 20). The cemetery was described as comprising 'a number of graves, over which three were "tombstones" ... in an advanced state of decay – the others were unmarked' (*The Age* 1929, June 22: p. 20). The exact number of graves identified at the cemetery is unknown, however, a photograph of the discovery thought to date from June 1929 depicts the headstones and identifies as least three of the deceased buried at the cemetery; Humble, 4 October 1884, aged 57; C. J. Wilmott, 22 July 1884; and B. Spreadbury, aged 50 (see Figure 8).

The historic record is unclear on the exact details of who was interred in the onsite cemetery associated with the Cut Paw Paw Sanatorium. Death certificates suggest that a total of eight individuals were associated with Paw Paw Sanatorium (*Births, Deaths and Marriages via personal email communication, Weatherall 26/02/21*): Of the list of eight, the headstones visible in Figure 7, clearly shows that the remains of Cicel Wilmot, Bridget Spreadbury and John Humble, were interred within the sanatorium graveyard and remained there until at least the early 1900s (specifically 1927 when the headstones were identified by the surveyor group). The location of the five remaining individuals is currently unknown. The death certificates relating to Robert Alway, Juan Singh and Partab Singh, indicates they were cremated, indicating that their remains may not have been interred.

By the 1930s, the former sanatorium or the 'Old Werribee Cemetery' as it became known, are removed from maps of the area. An ordnance map dating from 1934, neither identifies any structures at the location, nor does it identify or recognise the location of the cemetery (Figure 9). Furthermore, the earliest aerial photograph of the site, dating from 1945 shows the study area as comprising only cleared, marshy land. No features relating to the former sanatorium or the cemetery are distinguishable (Figure 10). Although not used for approximately 60 years, it was not until 1957 that the 'Old Werribee Cemetery' was discontinued under section 42 of the *Cemeteries Act 1928* (Victoria Government Gazette, 1957, March 13: p. 902). This statutory discontinuation was likely to be due to a need to re-gazette the land to facilitate the proposed expansion of the Altona oil refinery in the late 1950s into the adjacent properties.

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/>