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# SUBSURFACE FEATURES, LARA

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## Location

60 WATT STREET LARA, GREATER GEELONG CITY

## Municipality

GREATER GEELONG CITY

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7721-0542

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 21, 2021

The results of the inspection suggest that the subsurface features meet the threshold of an archaeological site in Victoria – the deposits noted at the pits most likely meet the minimum age criteria of 75 years and the features contain structural remains, artefacts and/or deposits. That the pits were likely filled and sealed in the mid-20th century suggests that the deposits are in a condition that would allow information to be obtained that will contribute to an understanding of the site.

It seems likely that the occupation of the property dates to the nineteenth century and the subsurface features form part of a complex associated with the early subdivision and development of the Lara township, as such the complex may be considered to demonstrate attributes associated with Victorian historical theme #6 – Building towns cities and the garden state. It is considered likely that the complex could be considered to hold local level significance for this theme. It should be noted that both additional historical research and an excavation of the subsurface features would likely assist in interpreting the origin and use of the features.

## Interpretation of Site

The subsurface features identified appear likely to be the remains of a well/water storage pit and another pit (cool store?) of unknown purpose associated with a nearby house site. The house has been in existence since at least 1912 but historical evidence indicates that it is possible that it dates to the late 19th century. While the historical evidence is open to some interpretation, and no evidence providing the exact dates of the two subsurface features has been found to date, the following can be stated: • Watts Road was formed as a result of the mid-1850s subdivision of John Highett's property into his planned 'Swindon' township; • A structure (most likely the house that was present on the property until recently) was in place on the property by 1912, but its original date of construction is not known. The formation of the local subdivision and roads suggests that the house may have been constructed any time following the mid-1850s. The proximity of the underground features to the house suggests that they were associated; and • The use of underground water storage tanks and wells was common in the Lara region in the 19th century. The house with which the underground features may be associated dates from at least 1912, but could be significantly earlier. The underground features may be associated with any phase of the house occupation, but pre-date the mid-twentieth century. Inspection of the features following their discovery suggests that it is likely the upper portions of the stone-lined pit or well were removed around 1920s-1940s and the pit was infilled with clay and rubbish. There is potential that the pit dates to late 19th to early 20th Century occupation but the possibility that lower deposits in the tank date to an earlier period of occupation cannot be discounted. Based on artefacts found in the fill of the larger pit, the fill mostly likely dates from the mid 20th century (c.1930s – 1940s). This interpretation of the dates is reinforced by the machine-made brick wall found along one side of the pit. The fill could most likely be attributed to household or farm waste and the demolition of outbuildings and sheds. Given the contemporaneous artefacts present in the pit and water tank it appears likely that they were infilled at the same time.

Hermes Number

207157

Property Number

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## History

In the 1850s land surrounding the (then future) location of the Lara Railway station was subdivided for sale by land owners of the region. In 1853 Thomas Bates offered Section 15 A of the parish of Moranghurk 'in lots varying from one to three acres as the village of Lara' (Rowe and Jacobs 2013: 38) At the same time, to the west, James Austin advertised Cheddar Farms and Cheddar Township, and John Highett competed to the east with the creation of the township of Swindon, 'prompted by the fact that the Geelong to Melbourne railway was to run through the area (Rowe and Jacobs 2013: 38).

The 60 Watt Street site is located within Highett's Swindon subdivision, the subsurface features appear most likely to be associated with a nearby weatherboard house (recently demolished) – this assessment is based on the proximity of the features to the former house site. The house certainly post-dates Highestt's subdivision as that subdivision created Watt Street, and the house was clearly oriented to the street.

Mapping indicates that the house was present in this location from at least 1912, but the history of land subdivision in the area suggests that it may have dated to the nineteenth century. While not all of Highett's Swindon subdivision sold in the original 1850s sale, the 60 Watt Street property was not included in the unsold property still in Highett's possession on his death in 1885, suggesting that the property had been purchased by the mid 1880s at the least and building may have occurred on the property any time after purchase.

Considering the interpretation of the stone-lined pit as a possible well, or water storage tank, it is of note that Rowe and Jacobs indicate that water supply and storage was problematic in the early decades of the post-contact settlement of the Lara region, and that 'private underground tanks and wells were...common throughout the area in the 19th century' (Rowe and Jacobs 2012: 24).

*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/>*