
FORMER MAIN STREET COMMERCIAL PRECINCT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

Location

BARKLY STREET BALLARAT EAST 3350

Municipality

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7622-0465

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 13, 2022

What is significant?

Main Street was well-established by 1858. It had a number of flourishing businesses including but not limited to butchers, restaurants, general stores, clothing stores, hotels, and theatres. The businesses of Main Street depict Ballarat as a multicultural center that can inform us about the mass migration event that occurred for the Victorian gold rush.

The archaeology of Main Street is believed to be 6ft to 11ft in parts due to the cutting of Victoria and Lydiard Street and sludge layers from the multiple flood events which occurred. The archaeology should be well-preserved and contain an array of material culture from different stores and people of different ethnicities. It will provide a wealth of information about life in Ballarat during the gold rush.

How is it significant?

The site is of historical, cultural, and archaeological significance.

Why is it significant?

The site is historically significant as the site of the first Main Street in Ballarat from 1851. From the perspectives of mass migration during the goldrush the site contains historical fabric, associations and meanings that are vital to the understanding of early globalization in southern Australia.

The Site has archaeological significance due to its potential to contain relics relating to the historic occupation of the site. The site has high potential to contain buried structures, features and deposits. Gold mining sites are of importance for the role they have played since 1851 in the development of Victoria. The archaeology of Main

Street has the potential to inform of life in Ballarat in the 1850s and 1860s and the types of people and cultures that were present and how they integrated.

Hermes Number 209203

Property Number

History

During the height of the gold rush, Ballarat was a central hub between the Buninyong, Clunes, and Sebastopol gold fields. The surrounding area was originally part of the Ballarat pastoral run held by William Cross Yuille and Archibald Buchanan Yuille from 1838 until gold was discovered in 1851. The discovery of gold in Ballarat and surrounding areas transformed Ballarat into a natural urban center.

Main Street (now known as Little Bridge Street and Main Road) was a cosmopolitan and multicultural center, originally extending from Buninyong to Grenville Street. During the early 1850s buildings were primarily constructed of timber, after several flood and fire events building forms evolved into more permanent structures.

As a result of the mining industry, there was an abundance of earth and rock refuse. This naturally filled up the gully that was Main Street over time, in addition to being purposefully redeposited to raise the building and protect the structures from destructive flooding.

The Fraser Reserve site is bound by Main Road to the west and Barkly Street to the east and was known as "Block P – Main Street". The site contained several prominent businesses including Eyre Bros & Newman, The Hermit's Cave Hotel, and the Montezuma Theatre. This area was a prime location in the 1850s and 1860s, however the town centre moved further west in the 1870s.

There were 28 structures fronting Main Street, this included four hotels The Hermits Cave, The Duchess of Kent, the John O'Groats and the Montezuma Hotel and theatre. There were a number of other businesses including grocers, watchmakers, tentmakers etc. which would have a separate and distinctive archaeological signature. To the south of the street front was an amount of smaller mining infrastructure relating to the alluvial mining of the place. The map shows whims, puddlers and ponds as well as a formed drain to the west and an unformed stream to the east.

The lower Main Street precinct was subject to several fire and flood events in the 1850s and 1860s. As puddling was the main form of mining that occurred in Ballarat West and East in the 1850s, sludge refuse from the puddling would fill creeks and drainage channels, as a result when heavy rain occurred low-lying parts of Ballarat would flood. In 1859 a flood tore up the plank boards forming Plank [Main] Street (Spielvogel Vol. 1: 63). 1865, 1866, 1867 and 1869 there was frequent flooding that caused damage to many premises. In 1870 there was a major flood that left inches of mud in the Main Road shop floors (Spielvogel Vol. 1: 55). Over 100,000 pounds of damage. A flood on 29 October 1870 caused many shops to be flushed out Ballarat west and east council worked together to remediate the flooding issues, the creek was straightened, deepened, and levelled (Spielvogel Vol. 1:56).

Ballarat is known to have multiple filling events to remediate the impacts of mining activities and to also prevent flooding. An F. W. Niven and Co.'s 1898 Picturesque Guide to Ballarat provides some insight into the amount of fill occurring in the mid-nineteenth century.

"Nearly the whole of Ballarat East, and the eastern portion of the city, have been turned over by indefatigable miners. The eastern end of Sturt Street stand upon several feet of "made" ground – old mining debris – and both in city and town, excavations are being made of the foundations of buildings and it is not uncommon for the workmen to find washdirt with a little gold in it"

1898 F. W. Niven and Co.'s picturesque guide to Ballarat.

The implications of that landscape change for archaeologists and heritage planners in the city today can be gleaned through the firsthand account of excavations along Main Street by another local historian A.W. Strange:

During the 1930s the writer was engaged in mining for gold on vacant blocks along Main Road between York and Eureka Streets and when sinking shafts as many as three old wooden floors were passed through, the lowest being on the original ground surface, the others were separated by feet of sludge, gravel, and waterlogged tailings and in some places by a thick layer of ashes containing melted glass and many fragments of china. These floods showed definite evidence that new buildings had been erected on top of flood debris or ashes after the destruction of the previous ones (Strange 1971:14).

By the 1870s the main precinct of Ballarat had moved westward to Sturt Street and it appears all nineteenth century structures were removed by 1973.

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/>