
MELBOURNE RAIL YARD ARTEFACT DEPOSIT

Location

30 DYNON ROAD, WEST MELBOURNE

Municipality

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7822-2417

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - November 29, 2022

What is significant?

An artefact deposits comprising of nineteenth century artefacts was discovered during bridge construction works. Bore works uncovered a high concentration of artefacts at 2m depth, below a railway ballast deposit. The artefact deposits continued until 8m depth. Below this deposit was grey silty clay containing shell fragments.

Historical maps show that the area was along the eastern edge of the former Melbourne Swamp, a 1879 drainage map shows that the site is within a pond of the Moonee Chain of Ponds. The railway was established between 1888 and 1890 sealing the swamp with 2m of railway fill.

It is likely that the pond was utilised as a rubbish dump throughout the nineteenth century, and in the 1870s the artefacts may have been deposited purposefully to remediate flooding or develop the land.

The site is currently a rail reserve comprising of rail lines and railway-related infrastructure.

How is it significant?

The site is of local historical and archaeological significance.

Why is it significant?

The site is of local historical significance and moderate archaeological significance for its potential to contain historical archaeological remains associated with the settlement and growth of early Melbourne. The site will provide some evidence of urban consumer discard behaviours in the late 19th century and past patterns of life and consumption. It will also provide information about waste disposal in this time period.

Interpretation
of Site

Based on the land use history evidence from archival maps and plans, the preliminary artefact analysis and the archaeological information, the Artefact Deposit must have been laid prior to the formation of the Melbourne Rail Yard and laying of railway lines and rail ballast in the 1880s-1890s. It seems most likely, given the depth of the deposit (2 to 3m below rail ballast and crush rock fill) that the artefacts are the result of discard from domestic or commercial premises, such as hotels or restaurants. The artefact assemblage is representative of activities such as food preparation and consumption, personal health and hygiene. The location of the deposit, right beside Dynon Road, and on the eastern edge of the West Melbourne Swamp, also supports this idea of informal rubbish disposal. The location is the point of the Swamp that is most easily accessed from North Melbourne, heading down Dynon Road. The subsequent expansion and development of the area for the Melbourne Rail Yards, saw the draining of the remainder of the Swamp and Moonee Ponds, and the filling of the area with crushed rock and ballast to create a level and stable substrate for railway lines.

Hermes
Number

209321

Property
Number

History

Analysis of historical maps and plans provides information about the post-contact history of the place. The land where the artefact scatter was found was originally on the eastern edge of the West Melbourne Swamp, as shown on the 1866 Port Phillip Hobson Bay map (Cox 1866). Dynon Road was formed by 1866 and the section that crosses what is now the Melbourne Rail Yards at its eastern end, had a different alignment in the 19th century. It is shown in its original alignment in the 1866 map at the eastern end, curving up to the north-east to cross a rail line that runs from the CBD to the north-west, past North Melbourne. The railway line from Spencer Street and the centre of Melbourne passing by North Melbourne is present, as are what looks like a railway cutting and many small buildings or sheds along the railway line. The Artefact Deposit is located right beside Dynon Road, where the road runs downhill and flattens out at the edge of the swamp. Dynon Rd, or Swamp Road as it was originally known, crossed over the swamp and the Moonee Ponds on a purpose-built causeway (Sornig 2018: 52). By 1879, at the location of the scatter there was a small pond present which may be the remains of water from the swamp and the Moonee Ponds. The swamp was in the process of being drained at this time and a drainage canal is shown encircling the perimeter of the swamp. The artefact deposit location is shown within or on the edge of this pond or pool, and the railway line passing by North Melbourne is indicated. Interestingly, Dynon Road is not shown in the map. (see 1879 Melbourne Harbour Trust map, Figure 4). Tenders for the reclamation of the swamp were awarded by 1877 (Sornig 2018:42), and the 1879 map confirms that the late 1870s were the beginning of the drainage of the swamp. A Harbor Trust map from 1893 demonstrates the development of the rail yard by that time (Figure 5). The rail lines up to North Melbourne had been substantially increased, and the rail lines heading northwest beyond Dynon Road had tripled. The North Melbourne Locomotive Maintenance yard area and the Coal Canal had both been established by that time. A 1910 map of West Melbourne Swamp area shows two allotments marked up in this location and no indication of the 1876 pond remaining (1910 SLV). This map shows that Dynon Road has a new alignment of its eastern end, connecting up with Munster Street, North Melbourne, and that the Artefact Deposit is located right beside Dynon Road. North Melbourne Station is marked on the map, indicating that the rail yard was being developed by that time. A map from c.1920s (Figure 7) from an archive of miscellaneous plans from the Victorian Railways, shows that the Melbourne Rail Yards were fully developed by that time and confirms the new alignment of Dynon Road over the rail yards to North Melbourne. Later aerial photos confirm that this was a new road bridge built over the railway lines and new rail yard. An aerial photo from 1951 shows further rail lines added to the Melbourne Rail Yard area, with several lines for train stabling had been added in the location of the artefacts scatter. In 1968 aerial photo, the eastern end of the Dynon Road alignment has been moved to the north-east with a new roadbridge added across the rail yard. In summary, this review of historical maps and archival aerial photos demonstrates that the location of the Artefact Deposit was on the edge of, or within the eastern part of the West Melbourne Swamp or Saltwater Lagoon in the mid 1800s, until the railway yards were established in the late 1880s-1890s. The Swamp was used a dumping ground for waste from at least the 1870s if not earlier (Sornig 2018: 45, 48). Although the

central and western sections of the Swamp were used for landfill refuse disposal by the Victorian Railways and Harbour Trust, and more formally by the City of Melbourne from the late 1880s (Sornig 2018: 48-53), the location at the eastern edge of the Swamp was more informally used for rubbish dumping by nearby local businesses and residences in North Melbourne and West Melbourne. Access was via convenient streets such as Dudley Street, West Melbourne, and Dynon Road.

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/>