O'DWYER'S STAMP BATTERY AND ASSOCIATED DAM

Location

HUNTLY-FOSTERVILLE ROAD FOSTERVILLE, GREATER BENDIGO CITY

Municipality

GREATER BENDIGO CITY

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7724-0647

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 14, 2023

What is significant?
The site contains the remains of a stamp battery and associated dam. The site contained a number of nineteenth and twentieth-century artefacts including late nineteenth century glass, ceramic and metal items.

The battery was likely constructed prior to 1895. Snoek describes the site as a 10-head-stamp battery. When surveyed by Andrew Long and Associates a smaller 5-head stamp battery was identified. Snoek's report dates the operational period as between 1895 and 1905.
How is it significant?
The stamp battery and associated dam is of local historical significance.
Why is it significant?
The Stamp Battery and Associated Dam site is of historical significance for its association with late 19th and early 20th century small scale gold mining in regional Victoria.
Gold mining in Fosterville can be characterised as a landscape of boom and bust. Many of the companies were small scale, made very little money, and the Fosterville area was colloquially referred to as the "Poor Man's Goldfield" (Snoek 1988). Gold miners had to rely on the resources in their immediate vicinity, and the use of pug and hewn timber logs to create the foundation for the stamp battery, lends to this notion. There is no water race or creek within close proximity to the site, so miners would have had to rely on water that they collected to

operate the stamp battery. The site is representative of this adaptation to the landscape and the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the local gold miners. Insight into the miners' lives and the operation of small scale gold mining in regional areas can be gained from this site.

Interpretation of Site	Pre- 19th Century: Traditional lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung people. Mid-19th Century: Gold discovered in 1850s and private prospecting and alluvial mining commences on a small scale. Small scale and private gold mining claims operated at the site during this time. Late 19th Century: A bill in Victoria was introduced in 1870 that allowed miners to operate and construct infrastructure on Crown land. The Fosterville township was formalized in 1894. A 5-head stamp battery and the associated dam site were constructed prior to 1895 and operated between 1895 and 1901. In 1897 an additional 10-head stamp battery was purchased; however, the O'Dwyer's claim was consolidated, and the mine became known as O'Dwyer's Consolidated. In 1898 works ceased, re-commenced, and the mine was managed by J.H. Curnow. Despite the increased exploration and gold extraction, no profit was made and the mine ceased operation in early 1899. In August 1899, the stamp battery and remaining mine infrastructure was removed and relocated to Heathcote. Early 20th Century: Mining begins to rapidly decline, and Fosterville Gold Mining Co. stops work between 1897-1902. By 1903, the township of Fosterville declined, and the mines began to close in 1906. Races and batteries in the area were repurposed for faming industries. Smaller estates were utilised for farming and the soldier settlement scheme. Cyanide works and ore treatments continued to operate until 1939. Late 20th -Present: Interest in Fosterville is renewed, and an Environmental Effects Statement (EES) was commissioned in 1996 to assess a gold mining venture utilising an open-cut mining method. Current underground mining operations commenced in 2005. The Stamp Battery and Associated Dam site is located in Wellsford Forest, within the Fosterville Gold Mine mining licence. The battery was constructed prior to 1895. Snoek described the stamp battery as a 10-head stamp battery; however, the remnants observed at the site inspection suggest that it was likely a smaller 5-head stamp battery. Evidence of the larger, 10-head stamp battery was not identified in the field. Snoek dates the operational period as between 1895 and 1905 and this is evidenced by the primitive technology used in the construction of the stamp battery and the dates of the artefacts in the artefact scatter adjacent to the stamp battery. A narrower timeframe of operation (1895-1901) has been supplied based on the documented evidence. Fosterville was a remote town, and miners had to rely on the resources readily available to them if they could not afford to get the supplies carted in. This is likely the reason for the use of pug and timber in the stamp battery foundation. The mullock heap referenced in Snoek's report was not identified in the field. Based on the plan provided in the report, the mullock heap was removed after 1988. Ore fragments were identified immediately north of the stamp battery; however, these are likely remnants of ore that were being fed into the stamp battery. The crushed ore produced by the stamp battery would have formed a slurry of rock dust, water, and gold which would have been separated out and collected. The channel leading away from the stamp battery to the dam was likely used to siphon away the water to be reused. No remnants of a tramway/mine cart infrastructure were identified in the field. This was likely auctioned and removed at the same time as the stamp battery in 1899. Archaeological evidence of the tramway may still be present at this site; however, because there is a 5-10m margin of error on the georeferenced 1896 Parish of Ellesmere plan (Figure 4) the exact original location of the main shaft is unknown. The pit feature is most likely related to the O'Dwyer claim, as it appears to be the most extensively explored claim in the northern portion of Hunt's Line reef. The northernmost claim, Rae and Rae and Hinnigan, were subject to open cut mining and there is no mention of the other claims (The Gunyah, Chambers and Todd, Middleton and Sexton, and McKenzie) in the literature. Based on the descriptions supplied in the newspaper articles, the O'Dwyer's mine is extensive subsurface. The site has been subject to post-depositional erosion processes, as is evidenced by the log coming away from the stamp battery foundation and the inconclusive nature of the artefact scatter. A photograph of the site was supplied in Snoek's report (Figure 8); however, due to the poor quality of the image, it is difficult to discern clear taphonomic changes (Snoek 1988, p. 62). The site and its relationship with other recorded sites within the historical fabric of the Fosterville area is demonstrated in Map 2.

Other Names	Site 38 Dam and Site 39 Stamp Battery,
Hermes Number	209537
Property Number	

History

Aspects of the following background history are drawn from the land use history developed for the Historical Heritage Technical Report (Geiberras and Hocking 2022) prepared for the Fosterville Gold Mine Environmental Effects Statement. The study area includes the traditional lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung people who were displaced from their land, as European people arrived and occupied the study area in the 1830s. Squatters were attracted to the area because of the farming potential, breeding sheep for their hides and wool, and later for their meat due to the population increase during the gold rush (Marshall 1996, p. 3 and Ballinger 2020, p.14). In the 1850s, gold was discovered in Fosterville and small scale mining including alluvial diggings such as gold panning and shallow pits operated across the landscape up until the 1890s (Marshall 1996, p.3). The site is located within land that was allocated as State Forest, northwest of the Fosterville township (Figure 2). The Crown lands were, “Excepted from Occupation etc. Under Mines Act”. This refers to the bill that was introduced in 1870 that allowed the Minister for Mines to grant a miner’s right or mineral license and to give 20-year leases for miners to build roads, water races and dams on Crown land as long as public infrastructure was not harmed (The Sydney Morning Herald 1877, p.8). The quartz reefs were officially opened in 1894 and the township of Fosterville was formalised (Ballinger 2020, p.44). At least six batteries were operating in the Fosterville area in the early 1890s; however, only two were crushing ore at any given time due to the scarcity of water (Bannear n.d., p.140). A water race was established in 1896, and as a result multiple private claims expanded and became established, with at least eleven stamp batteries recorded as operating by 1897 (Ballinger 2020, p.40 and Bannear and Watson 1994, p.38). The site is located in the northernmost section of Hunt’s Line quartz reef (Figure 3). The stamp battery, dam, and pit feature were most likely associated with the O’Dwyer claim (Figure 4). The first mention of a stamp battery owned by O’Dwyer is an 1896 newspaper article detailing that O’Dwyer, a battery owner at Ellesmere, was fined 10s for forcing an engine driver to work twelve hours, instead of eight, every day for several months (The Argus 1896, p.6). In April 1897, the Bendigo Advertiser reported that in addition to the 5-head stamp battery located at the O’Dwyer’s claim, that an additional 10-head stamp battery was to be added to the site (Bendigo Advertiser 1897, p.5). The quartz reef at this location was described as a “saddle formation” comprised of quartz and gold and the crushings were producing 11oz of gold per ton of ore crushed (Bendigo Advertiser 1897, p.5). This is equivalent to 311 grams per 907 kilograms. The article further details the scarcity of water, and reports that despite these returns, the battery was, “hung up for want of water” (Bendigo Advertiser 1897, p.5). The area east of Hunt’s line began to decline in 1897, the O’Donnell and O’ Dwyer’s claims were consolidated, and the company’s shares were floated on the market (Bannear n.d., p.149). From this point forward, the claim was referred to as O’Dwyer’s Consolidated. For a time, the O’Dwyer Consolidated ceased operations; however, works recommended in March 1898 (The Bendigo Independent 1898, p. 1). Under a new manager, J.H. Curnow, operations continued, and a new shaft was sunk further south to meet up with the crosscuts that had already been excavated (The Bendigo Independent 1898, p. 1). It was recorded that prior to this a total of 896 loads of ore had been crushed and a total of 224oz (6.35kg) of gold had been extracted (The Bendigo Independent 1898, p. 1). The shaft dimensions were also detailed as follows: I extended your south drive 63ft, making total of 120ft from the shaft. This drive is carrying fair gold in the face. A crosscut west was put in to get the west leg which was trick in 10ft, the formation being 6ft wide from wall to wall. At this point between these walls we have a diorite formation about 20ft wide which is intermixed with spurs carrying payable gold. These spurs are all dipping south. We have risen 10ft on the back of the south drive. The stone here is poor but I think we will make it pay when our new shaft is sunk to this level. We have started your main shaft 105ft south of our whip shaft. When this shaft is down it will enable us to work the mine 25 per cent cheaper than at present…. I have crushed 625 tons from all parts of your mine for a return of 148oz 13dwt of gold. (The Bendigo Independent 1898, p. 1). Four months later, the mine manager reported that 2120 tons (2120000 kg) of ore had been crushed and 400oz (11.33 kg) 19dwt of gold had been extracted at the claim (The Bendigo Independent 1898, p. 1). Despite this amount of gold being extracted, the claim was still not making a profit and hoped to make it on the dividend list soon (The Bendigo

Independent 1898, p. 1). It was reported that they were continuing to sink the shaft and put in additional crosscuts at 76ft and 45ft with the aim to chase the reef northwest as the gold continued to slope down at a sharp angle (The Bendigo Independent 1898, p. 1). It was also reported that a tramway from the shaft to the battery was erected to reduce the cost of cartage. An example of the mine cart tramway at the Daley and Watson claim, approximately 7km south of the O'Dwyer Consolidated claim, is demonstrated in Figure 5. Despite the hopes to make a profit, O'Dwyer's Consolidated claim ultimately collapsed. In January 1899, all unpaid shares for O'Dwyer's Consolidated were auctioned on the public market (The Bendigo Independent 1899, p. 4). In February 1899, the manager of the claim tried to auction the infrastructure, including: a 10-head stamp battery, tailings pump, bellows, anvil, blacksmith's tools, and copper plates (The Bendigo Independent 1899, p.2). In July 1899, a newspaper article declared that the lease for the O'Dwyer's Consolidated was void (Bendigo Advertiser 1899, p.4). In August 1899, a newspaper article recorded that The Mundy Gully (South Heathcote) company had recently purchased the O'Dwyer's Consolidated stamp battery and that tenders had been accepted for its removal and relocation (The Bendigo Independent 1899, p.4). The contractors for the removal and relocation of the stamp battery began the removal process in September 1899 (The Bendigo Independent 1899, p. 4). In 1901 a newspaper article detailed a claims dispute between O'Dwyer and O'Keefe (Bendigo Advertiser 1901, p.4). O'Dwyer wanted to mine an area adjoining the old O'Dwyer's Consolidated company's lease, which O'Keefe owned (Bendigo Advertiser 1901, p.4). It was alleged that O'Dwyer had already paid royalty and rent to O'Keefe; however, O'Keefe felt that it was not enough compensation and that the land would be ruined by the mining works (Bendigo Advertiser 1901, p.4). The court favored O'Dwyer and stated that O'Keefe was not entitled to any compensation (Bendigo Advertiser 1901, p.4). Despite this ruling, after this date, there are no further records of O'Dwyer operating or managing any other mines at Fosterville and activity at the O'Dwyer's Consolidated mine appears to have ceased. This decline mirrors what happened across the Victorian goldfields; the price of gold, the large scale operations required to access deeper quartz reefs, and the onset of World War 1 were all driving factors towards the consolidation and eventual collapse of historical gold mining in the early 20th century (Ballinger 2020, p. 45). Private claims were common in the goldfields; however, information about the numerous small scale private parties is limited, and likely a result of the short lived nature of mining in this area (Bannear n.d., p.149). As a further result, the township of Fosterville began to decline in 1903, and the mines began to close in 1906 (Marshall 1996, p.3). It was during this decline that the races once used for the batteries were repurposed for dairying and agriculture for the farming region (Victorian Places, Fosterville, 2015). In 1937, Fosterville was included on the list of closed mines that was to be subject of the shaft filling scheme (Bannear n.d., p.196). This scheme involved the filling and securing of dangerous open shafts and commenced in 1935, funded by grants to create work during the depression following World War 1 (Bannear n.d., p.196). Although mining ceased in the area, the cyanide works and ore treatment plants continued to operate until 1939 (Bannear n.d., p. 197). The site was first documented in Snoek's report, Archaeological Study of Fosterville, Central Victoria. The Site 38: Dam and Site: 39 Stamp Battery are described as being associated with Rae's Pit (now called Rehe) (Snoek 1988, p.16) (Figure 6). The channel observed during the recent site inspection is not described in the study; however, Snoek states that the dam is associated with an open-cut and the remains of the Site 39: Stamp Battery (Snoek 1988, p.16). The stamp battery is described as being, "partially covered by a mullock heap" and consisting of "wooden cross sills and the battery's mortar blocks," set into pug and stone foundations (Snoek 1988, p.16). A plan of the site was provided in the report (Figure 7). Snoek suggested, based on the size of the remnant stamp battery, that the original battery would have been at least a 10-head stamp battery (Snoek 1988, p.16). According to Snoek, Chambers, Todd, Middleton, Sexton, McKenzies, and the O'Dwyer's all had claims associated with Rae's Pit area and concludes that the stamp battery was in operation between 1895 and 1900 (Snoek 1988, p.16). In the late 20th century, interest in Fosterville was renewed and in 1996 an EES was commissioned to assess a gold mining venture utilising open-cut mining methods at Fosterville. By 1998, the mine was producing approximately 40,000 ounces of gold a year from oxide mineralization with prospects of further gold from sulfide mineralization (Victorian Places, Fosterville, 2015). The current underground mining operations commenced in 2005 and focused on near-surface, low grade mineralization. Between 2015 and 2017, high grade visible gold mineralization was intersected at depth leading to underground expansion doubling the underground mineral reserves. The mine is the largest gold producer in the state of Victoria.