
BRIDGE STREET MALL BALLARAT, ROADWAYS PRECINCT

Location

BRIDGE STREET MALL, BALLARAT

Municipality

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7622-0469

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - July 12, 2023

What is significant?

This precinct potentially contains archaeological remains associated with the early goldrush activity in Ballarat East. The archaeology could provide evidence associated with the significant changes that occurred in the landscape as a result of the influx of people to the area from late 1851. They flocked to the eastern side of the Yarrowee River, and a settlement formed along the mining leads. Bridge Street developed into an important commercial district and was a major thoroughfare through the town. The potential preservation of the 1850s and 1860s mining landscape is important to demonstrating the development of these chaotic goldrush areas into busy commercial districts of the 1870s. The streetscape was modified and improved throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and in the 1980s was redeveloped into a mall. These later redevelopments may not have completely removed remains of the nineteenth century landscape due to the presence of extensive amounts of fill and sludge that covered the area in the 1850s and 1860s. This inundation resulted in street levels and properties having to be raised to the current surfaces of the area.

How is it significant?

The precinct is significant as it potentially contains buried deposits and features associated with the landscape of early goldrush town of Ballarat East. Its preservation under sludge and fill could provide physical remains that demonstrate how these marginal settlements developed and how people adapted to living in mining areas.

Why is it significant?

This precinct is significant as a potentially rare, buried gold mining landscape in Ballarat. It may also have evidence of the development of the commercial shopping centre of Bridge Street throughout the nineteenth and

twentieth century.

The following is a summary of prior land use activities could have leave archaeological remains within the study area; • Goldmining activity, extensive modification of the landscape and water courses, thousands of people living and working in the area. • Impacts from goldmining waste including dispersal of tailings and sludge compounded by flooding events that appear to have washed through the study area on repeated occasions covering or disturbing old surface levels. • Raising levels either deliberately or from inundation in the Bridge Street area – between 3 to 13 feet, perhaps more. Buildings raised along the street using timber blocks and then introduction of fill under the buildings. Impacts of fires and rebuilding in brick, especially after the 1859 fire. • Works directly to Yarrowee River since the start of the gold rush in 1851. Gold mining effectively obliterated its course, choaking it with mining waste combined with the impact of flooding. Filling the original alignment at Grenville Street, channelling it and redirecting it along what is now Coliseum Walk followed by substantial earthworks to make the channel system permanent. • Works to the bridge at Bridge Street. Its replacement and eventual removal. • Bridge street as an early commercial district, densely built-up along the edge of the street. Reworking of old ground for mining towards the rear of the properties with larger infrastructure including puddling, whims, ponds and wash areas and shafts to access leads. • Improvement works to Bridge Street and laneways. Stone lined guttering evident in Bridge Street and at Grenville Street where it is still visible. Timber planking laid over the channel along Coliseum Walk in 1904 and covered over (or removed) in the 1950s. Road surfaces improved, asphalt laid and electrified trams along Bridge Street. • In 1981 Bridge Street was closed to traffic and converted to a mall with new paving laid over, trams no longer using the roadway with the tracks apparently covered over. Some sections removed or displaced.

Hermes
Number

209736

Property
Number

History

Following discovery of payable amounts gold in the Ballarat area miners flocked to the district and by mid-October 1851 there were thousands working individually or in small groups on shallow alluvial deposits (Strange 1971:8, Supple 1999: 7). As these readily accessible deposits were exhausted deeper shafts were sunk with the main leads Eureka, Gravel Pits and Canadian in East Ballarat (Strange 1971:9). The Gravel Pits lead crossed right under Bridge Street (originally Main Road / Street). This mining activity resulted in significant impacts that altered the landscape in ways not previously seen. Within a short time, the Yarrowee River was altered, cut and diverted becoming increasingly polluted from the sheer number of people in the area generating filth, sewerage, rubbish, animal waste, as well as the huge levels of mining related waste (Bate 1978: 30, 99). The original course of the Yarrowee is depicted in the 1852 town survey plan (with the precinct overlaid) by W.S. Urquhart and shows the river close to what was to become Grenville Street. The redirected path is shown in the 1859 Yuilles Swamp plan crossing Bridge Street. Much of the waste and mining debris ended up in the waterways, gullies and spread out over the goldfields in the form of sludge. During flood events it inundated everything in its path and became a significant issue for the new commercial district in East Ballarat (Lawrence and Davies 2019:19). The sludge situation was compounded from 1856 by miners reworking old ground on the 'disembowelled flat' using more intensive methods of horse powered puddling that generated even more sludge (Bate 1978:99). Feature 553 Ballaarat (sic.) Township Reserve, W.S. Urquhart 1852.with study area overlaid Yuilles Swamp, J.H. Taylor 1859 PROV) Within the diggings meandering tracks formed organically with prominent ones becoming permanent streets. One of these was Main Road (also known as Main Street) and was described by Weston Bates (historian) as the 'spine of Ballarat East' (Bate 1978:99). Main Road (Street), at its westerly extent where it met with the Yarrowee River was named Bridge Street after a crossing point (Bradby no date 4). The width of the bridge crossing has been put forward as the reason why this section of the street is narrower than that of Sturt Street. Bridge Street became a commercial hub for the district as indicated in the 1857 revised plan blocks A, B,

C and D below, yet mining activity continued wherever miners could access including in close proximity to the buildings. This generated even more sludge which was again compounded during flood events and eventually led to the streets and buildings being raised. An 1859 plan of the eastern end of Sturt Street shows the earlier meandering streets and buildings with the new Grenville Street overlaid. The levels of Bridge Street and surrounds were raised (reported to be up to 13 feet by Strange 1971:26) as a direct result of the inundations from mining waste, floods, filling and modifications generally to the landscape from gold mining activity. 1857 plan of Main Street (Bridge Street) Revised plan of blocks A. B. C. D., Main Street, Ballarat Township allotments, Sturt Street, Ballarat 1859. SLV s A further threat to the commercial district was the ever-present possibility of fire, including a large one that occurred in December 1859, reportedly starting in Bridge Street that resulted in extensive damage (The Star 5 /12/ 1859). After the fire on Bridge Street the timber shops were generally rebuilt in brick as seen in the 1866 photograph by Archibald Vincent Smith, which also shows the bridge crossing over the Yarrowee Channel under the road in the central part of the image (Bate 1978:113). These events of fire and flood as well as mining activity may have contributed to the formation of archaeological deposits in the study area as buildings that were destroyed were replaced by new ones, often resulting in the burial of remains of the earlier structures and deposits. View of Bridge Street 1866, Archibald Vincent Smith (SLV) Over the next few years Bridge Street became less of a mining area and more like a shopping strip with Sturt and Bridge Streets considered by the 1870s to be well-respected commercial hubs "lined with well stocked elegant shops" (Strange 1971:29). According to Nathan Spielvogel, in 1863 the footpaths were covered with timber planks which were subsequently washed away during a flood in 1870 (Spielvogel 2004a:55 and 2004b:51). Bridge Street in an 1880s photograph shows a busy street with prominent buildings with verandas and on the edge of the footpath are stone lined gutters and kerbing of the same type that currently exists in Grenville Street (Bate 1978:209). The road surface at this time appears roughly formed, perhaps with gravel. In 1904 timber decking for a footpath was installed along Coliseum Walk over the covered Yarrowee channel (The Australasian 29 February 1908: page 523. Ballarat Improvements, Hansen Partnerships 2003: 183). The Ballarat Heritage Study notes that the timber decking was replaced by a reinforced concrete deck, probably in the 1950s which could exist under the present surface treatments. When tramways (horse trams) were first proposed in Ballarat in 1884 the line was not proposed to extend up Bridge Street, probably due to the narrowness of the street (Kings no date: 8). The route was subsequently extended, and the system was electrification from 1905 (Kings no date 21, Tramways Museum website). Photographs from 1935 and 1940s/50s show the tram routes up Bridge Street, asphalt road surface but with stone kerbing and guttering still in place. A recent services check conducted by City of Ballarat identified what was thought to be the alignment of the tracks under the current mall surface, although possibly not in situ. Bridge Street Ballarat, ca.1940s/50s postcard. (Rose Series SLV

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