
BENALLA RAILWAY STATION AND YARD

Location

MACKELLAR STREET BENALLA, BENALLA RURAL CITY

Municipality

BENALLA RURAL CITY

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H8024-0016

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 7, 2024

What is significant?

Archaeological features and deposits associated with Benalla Railway Station and Yard including

. the 1884 station building

- Signal Hut A
- goods shed
- round house turntable foundations

How is it significant?

Benalla Railway station and yard is of historic and archaeological significance

Why is it significant?

Benalla Railway Station and Yard is of historic significance as a major railway station, the opening of which had a profound impact on the development of Benalla in the late C19th. It is also significant as a key station on the route between Melbourne and Sydney and a site for a number of regional branch lines, as evidenced by the rapid expansion of the Station's infrastructure in the years immediately following its opening. It is of archaeological significance for features and deposits from the railway precinct to provide information on the use and development of the precinct

Interpretation
of Site

Phase 1: The North Eastern Railway and Benalla Railways Station – 1870s The original layout of the railway station from 1873 included a weatherboard timber station building, passenger platform, water tower and a goods shed (bluestone foundation and corrugated iron walls and roof). Due to later station and railway yard upgrades, none of these original elements remain. • Archaeological deposits associated with the weatherboard timber station building and original passenger platform are not expected to remain owing to subsequent disturbance from new structures and or rail infrastructure. The original timber station building was quickly replaced with the current standing station building, while the original simple passenger platform would likely have been upgraded to support the new station building as well. • The original goods shed was located opposite the station building, it was demolished to make way for new passenger platforms which in turn were demolished to make way for changes to the rail easements. It is unlikely given that archaeological elements of this structure remain other than trace contaminants. • Elements of the water tower may exist under the current railway station car park west of the current main station building • The current bichromatic red and white brick single storey station building was constructed in 1874 is still standing. • The engine fitter's shed constructed in late 1873/early 1874 was destroyed by a storm in 1994, but foundations rail and a metal frame for a crane are still present. Phase 2 - Growth – 1880s–1920s The majority of archaeological values relating to the site date to this period of rapid expansion of the site. Key archaeological features that still or likely exist include: • the cellar and ancillary structures (toilets and laundry) of the 1888 (demolished in 1974) extension to the existing station building located under the western railway station carpark. • The round house foundations and inspection/access pits • Signal Hut B foundations • post office – located to the immediate east of the current station building • lamp room – located to the immediate east of the current station building • gasometer– located to the immediate east of the current station building • footbridge – partial foundations be present to the immediate east of the current station building • two or three potential house structures located on the southern side of Hannah Street Key archaeological archaeological features from past rail features likely to have been destroyed include • coal loader – structure was on a raised embankment which has been removed • Victoria Railways Institute building – demolished for the railway line adjacent to Mackellar Street and road overpass • station master's house – demolished for the railway line adjacent to Mackellar Street and road overpass • Armstrong residence and water tower - – demolished for the railway line adjacent to Mackellar Street and road overpass • new pedestrian platform (1913) – likely destroyed doing rail yard modifications to the rail lines The only remaining structure from this period is the existing goods shed located in the north of the Station yard. Phase 3 - Downsizing – 1930s–1960s This phase represents the beginning of demolition and remodelling of the railway yards to adapt for changes in rail technology, movements and the societal shift to increased focus on rail freight. New workers camps and a Victorian Rail Institute Hall were constructed near the corner of Mackellar and Byrne Street – since demolished. Aspects of these features may still be present in this location Phase 4 – Continued Downsizing – 1970s–Present Most of the remaining heritage structures including the 1888 extension to the railway station are demolished due to upkeep and maintenance issues or succumb to natural disasters. Today the remaining structures within the railway precinct include: • the 1884 station building • Signal Hut A • McKenzie & Holland Teardrop Bell located at Nunn Street Crossing, adjacent to Signal Hut A • goods shed • round house turntable foundations • new works depot and associated shed.

Hermes
Number

210069

Property
Number

History

The North Eastern Railway and Benalla Railways Station - 1873

Following the acquisition of the Melbourne and Essendon Railway Company (the historic precursor of VicRail) by the Victorian Government in 1867, The North-Eastern Railway Act was passed in 1869 with the aim of connecting Melbourne and rural Victoria to the markets of Sydney by rail via Belvoir (Wodonga). Initially extending the existing rail network from Essendon to Seymour in 1872, the line reached Benalla in 1873, with the first station opened on 18 August in the same year. The arrival of the rail had a pronounced effect on the township of Benalla, with the establishments of hotels, banks and two newspapers following shortly after. In fact, it was the wealth that the railway brought that attracted the attention of the Kelly Gang, who had intended to ransack the town once their plan to murder the police contingent at Glenrowan via train derailment was enacted.

An illustration from 1873 shows the original station layout, including a weatherboard timber station building, passenger platform, water tower and a goods shed (bluestone foundation and corrugated iron walls and roof). Recognising the station's early importance, a bichromatic red and white brick single storey station building was constructed in 1874, replacing the previous timber version. The structure included a ticketing office and parcel area. An engine fitter's shed was also constructed in late 1873/early 1874 and would endure until destroyed by a storm in 1994.

Growth – 1880s–1920s

As rail traffic increased, Benalla Station greatly increased in importance as both a key station on the route to Sydney and also as a junction for various branch lines. To cater for this increased importance, the station precinct was upgraded, receiving a number of significant improvements from the 1880s onwards, including:

an extension to the existing station building, comprising dining and refreshment room facilities and administrative offices (1888); this new significant structure was of two-storeys with jerkin style roof and included cellars, refreshment rooms (bar and dining room) at the platform level, offices and accommodation (consisting of five bedrooms and a bathroom above), capped by a central three-storey tower.

- a round house capable of housing 20 locomotives
- coal loader
- two signal huts (1914)
- Victoria Railways Institute building with billiards room, library and recreation hall along with two tennis courts
- station master's house
- post office
- lamp room
- gasometer
- footbridge
- new pedestrian platform (1913)
- new goods shed.

By 1929, Benalla Railway Station employed over 100 employees, including 108 people who worked at the locomotive sheds, 12 people who worked at the refreshment room and 65 employees who worked for the transportation branch (tickets, telegrams, goods and livestock freight) (Anon 1929).

The interwar years saw a decline in the fortunes of the station with the coming of the Depression, use of Dining Cars on trains reducing the need for extended stops at regional stations and the emergence of motorised transportation (passenger and freight). Business at the refreshment room dropped from £7,000 to £1,800 per annum as the station pivoted from passengers to freight and livestock (Anon 1936). Despite a royal visit in 1954, Benalla Station was, even by this point, in a process of downsizing from its previous importance.

Key changes included the:

- removal of the second passenger platform (1937)
- construction of a new parallel standard gauge rail line between the station and Mackellar Street and partial demolition of the round house
- a road overpass over the new rail line that required the demolition of the original VR Institute Building, the Station Master's house and a residential property
- pedestrian underpass under the new rail line.
- Early plans and photographs also noted a number of ancillary structures (likely laundry related) outside in the yard of the refreshment room extension facing Mackellar Street that were removed for the new rail line. Plans from the 1960s provide a floor plan of the ground floor which would have been little changed from its

early design.

Downsizing – 1970s–Present

The decline of Benalla Station continued from the late 1970s through to the present, most notably with the demolition of the refreshment room in 1974. Despite significant outcry by the National Trust and local organisations, the three-storey tower and the two-storey structure representing the refreshment rooms were demolished due to its financial burden on VicRail for upkeep and the alleged presence of termites, leaving the single-story ticketing office and parcel area. The nature and extent of the demolition works is unknown, but local knowledge identifies that the structure was levelled to the ground surface with the cellar infilled with construction rubble to support the future car park in this area. Oral history provided to Dennis (1997) furthermore indicates that the cellar system extended under the extant station building, in the area of the current ablutions, with a second under the parcels office at the east end of the station building. The cellar under the current ablutions was initially retained to allow for the plumbing. The space was accessed via a pit located on the MacKellar Street side of the building. Both cellars were filled in during the 1970s (Dennis 1997, p.13).

Plans of the existing and demolished sections of the railway station provided by the Benalla Station Master show that the footprint of the demolished building extended south-east from the extant station by approximately 6 m. The rough elevation of the demolished building is between 10 and 12 m and included a system of cellars with foundations having the form of piers and arches.

Since the demolition of this structure, the station has continued to be downgraded in importance with more structures removed/demolished to its current layout. Significant events include the following:

- 22 November 1994 Benalla Storm – The locomotive shed collapsed under heavy winds.
- 2013 – After closure of goods shed, it was converted to local boxing gym.
- 16 February 2022 – Signal Hut A sustains significant damage after being impacted by a vehicle.

Today the remaining structures within the railway precinct include:

- the 1884 station building
- Signal Hut A
- McKenzie & Holland Teardrop Bell located at Nunn Street Crossing, adjacent to Signal Hut A
- goods shed
- round house turntable foundations
- new works depot and associated shed.

SiteCard data copied on 07/08/2024: The Benalla Railway Station was first constructed in 1873. The current station buildings were constructed between 1889-1890 and consisted of: • a single storey ticketing office and parcel area, • a central three-storey tower, and • a two-storey structure containing cellars, refreshment rooms and offices above. In 1974, the three-storey tower and the two-storey structure were demolished, leaving the single-story ticketing office and parcel area. The nature and extent of the demolition works is unknown.

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/>