
JUNCTION CHINESE TEMPLE SITE

Location

SCOTCHMAN CREEK TRACK BUCKLAND, ALPINE SHIRE

Municipality

ALPINE SHIRE

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H8224-0078

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - October 10, 2023

What is significant?

Rich gold deposits were discovered in the Buckland Valley in North-East Victoria in 1853, and the subsequent rush drew some 6,000 miners to the field, almost depopulating the Beechworth field, and attracting diggers from all over the colony. In the mid-1850s, large numbers of Chinese diggers began arriving on the field, and by early 1857 they outnumbered the Anglo-saxons by four or five to one.

Great resentment was felt by sections of the Anglo-Saxon population, and after a few minor skirmishes, the valley erupted into violence on the 4th of July 1857, in an event known as the Buckland Riots. A Chinese population of 2000 to 2500 were driven from the valley. Many were severely beaten, their huts and tents looted and burnt, and their claims jumped. Three Chinese died in the aftermath of the riots, but many more were said to have been killed, and their bodies hidden of before the police detachment arrived from Beechworth. After order was restored, the Chinese miners began trickling back to the field, and were eventually present in greater numbers than before the riots, where they concentrated at several locations including The Junction.

The Temple site at the junction is still clearly discernible and represents the tenacity of the Chinese people in surviving and persevering in the Buckland Goldfields, providing tangible evidence of the continued strength they held in their faith and religious practice, following the riot of 1857, despite the adversity that they experienced. No historical records relating specifically to this site were found during research.

How is it significant?

The Junction Temple site is of historical, social and archaeological significance to the State of Victoria.

Criterion C – Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria’s regional cultural history.

Criterion D – Importance in demonstrating the principle characteristics of a class of cultural places or objects.

Criterion G - Strong or special association with a particular present-day community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

Why is it significant?

The Junction Chinese temple site is historically, scientifically and socially significant to the State of Victoria because it provides tangible evidence of the strong Chinese presence amongst the mining community within the Buckland Valley, which required the building of more than one temple site to service the needs of the Chinese community. The archaeological features of this site are preserved by regenerating riparian forest, which provides the physical context for understanding the difficult Alpine environment early miners had to contend with.

Historical significance - High

The temple building is important in showing patterns in the development of history at a regional and state-wide level, as interpretation of the site from available historic imagery, and from the site feature survey itself, indicates that the building was of a similar template/ design to the temple erected in the township of Bright and at other regional localities (see Attachment 3 for comparison). This provides evidence that the building style applied was planned and more widely applied in Victoria, which was likely driven by the religious customs and beliefs brought from the homeland.

Scientific/ archaeological significance – High:

The Chinese temple site is relatively undisturbed and as such has high scientific/ archaeological potential to reveal substantial new information and new understandings about Chinese people, and their places and worship practices within the Buckland Valley. The significance of this archaeological site is heightened by the lack of published and photographic evidence available that could inform Chinese Temple construction and use in the Buckland Valley. Artefacts and building foundations that remain at the site can provide further information on the activities undertaken at the Temple and the adjoining residential building, including;

- Building design and construction of places of worship,
- Tools or objects relating to worship.
- Daily domestic items, food storage vessels, diet, table and cooking ware items, etc.
- Personal items.

Social significance

The Chinese Temple site is significant as a local marker of the importance that Chinese people placed on religion within the Buckland Valley, with the Temples erected early in the gold rush period. The place is culturally significant to the National and International Chinese community as it is a tangible reminder of their ancestors connection to, and struggles in their new foreign land, as the Temple would have provided a sense of belonging and unity as a time when the Chinese community in the Buckland Valley were faced with, and experiencing extreme racial vilification.

Interpretation/Presentation Values – Medium

The proximity of the Temple site to the Scotchman Creek Track and the Buckland Valley Road provides easy access and opportunity for interpretation and viewing of the Temple site. However, access would be best restricted to one access/ viewing point to reduce impacts on artefacts that may be further dislodged and eroded downslope.

Interpretation of Site

The Temple and building site- occur on a benched level area (approximately 10 x 5 metres) above the Scotchman Creek Track. The remains of a fireplace occur at the southern end of the benched area. The fireplace/ hearth is made of broken sandstones and handmade brick fragments, and measures approximately 1430mm long x 1350mm wide x 500mm high. A section of rock retaining wall of river cobble and broken sandstones also remains insitu. Surface artefact scatterdown bank: Mid-late 19th century domestic refuse/rubbish, including glass bottles, ceramic tableware fragments, sundry metal work and flat iron, etc. Chinese items include fragments of celadon, winter green and brown stoneware food containers. Alluvial workings including a shaft and water races also occur in proximity to the Temple site, as well as early 20th Century domestic refuse (artefact scatter including glass bottles, ceramic tableware, etc).

Other Names The Junction - Joss House,

Hermes
Number 210149

Property
Number

History

The auriferous alluvial deposits within the Buckland Valley extended along the river for over 30 kilometres, from the Buckland's junction with the Ovens River to approximately 8 kilometres above the junction of the East and West branches of the Buckland River (where The Junction settlement was located). By 1857 there was a population of about 500 Anglo-Saxon miners and some 2,000 to 2,500 Chinese miners within the Buckland Valley. Anglo-Saxon miners felt increasingly threatened by the large number of Chinese, their industrious nature, and their relative success from working claims abandoned by the Anglo-Saxon miners. The increasing presence of the Chinese, fuelled by the recent opening of a new larger temple on Joss House Hill (at Lower Flat), culminated in a major uprising against the Chinese during the celebrations of American Independence Day on the 4th of July 1857. This riot which started near the Junction, escalated in intensity and violence as the angry mob moved down the Valley in their attempts to eradicate the Chinese. A scene of devastation was left in their path - smouldering tent frames, torn and trampled possessions, broken crockery and rice strewn over the blackened earth. Police arrived from Beechworth days later, the first a detachment under Robert O'Hara Burke (of Burke and Will's fame). The Chinese soon returned to the Buckland, and again became a significant portion of the population. In the aftermath of the riot a designated Chinese Camp was established at the Junction, along with two other locations in the Valley, in an attempt to separate Chinese and Anglo-saxon miners. The Chinese preferred to stay in or near these designated camps as they provided a safe haven and afforded them protection via the Chinese protector who acted as liaison with law enforcement. The Junction was the Buckland's main upper commercial centre, and was a run-off point for workings up the West and East branches of the Buckland River. In addition to the Temple (Joss House), numerous stores, hotels, a post office, and school were located in the vicinity of the Junction.

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/>