FAIRFIELD RAILWAY STATION SIGNAL BOX

City of Darebin Heritage Review 2000

Map Ref: 30 K10

NOT within Heritage Overlay Area.

City of Darebin Heritage Review 2000

Location

Station Street FAIRFIELD, Darebin City

Municipality

DAREBIN CITY

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO106

Heritage Listing

Darebin City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

The signal box at Fairfield station was commissioned on 24th. October 1913 and built to a standard design of the Victorian Railways Department during J.W. Hardy's term of office as chief architect for the Way and Works Branch. It housed a 47 lever cam and tappet interlocking machine presumably built by the Victorian Railways at their Newport workshops. This frame has since been part removed (?) the present 26 lever frame accommodating 10 levers. The signal box was closed on 28th. February, 2000.

It has historic, aesthetic, technical and social importance.

It is historically important (Criterion A) as the earliest surviving signal box of its type in the metropolitan area and the equal oldest of its type in the State, comparing in this respect with the Creswick signal box. Whilst this distinction applies to the characteristic hipped roof form with which tappet locking is associated, this type of locking appears to have been introduced slightly earlier in 1910 and incorporated at that time in boxes with the standard gable roof The Fairfield box, therefore, is the equal oldest surviving example of the hipped roof standard design associated with tappet locking: a combination which dominated signal box design from 1913 until the early 1960s. The Fairfield box is historically important also for its capacity to indirectly recall the status of Fairfield Park as the junction station for the Outer Circle railway. Whilst the signal box post dates the closure of this line, Fairfield Park's status as a junction originates with this railway and was perpetuated during the life of the present Fairfield box by the Australian Paper Manufacturers' siding opened on a small section of the old Outer Circle railway right of way.

It is aesthetically important (Criterion E) as a key and visually prominent element of the substantially intact Fairfield station complex of 1911, marking the point of entry to the Fairfield shopping centre from the south. In this respect it demonstrates a past urban form characterised by the once ubiquitous elevated signal box controlling the movement of road and rail vehicles at grade crossings. The elevation of the structure on an exposed cross braced frame recalls such nineteenth century industrial architectural forms as coal screens and mining head frames and was not commonly used with signal boxes. This importance is enhanced by the level of integrity of the place which extends to the surviving balustrade remnant, probably unique since the demolition of Flinders Street B box and the use of strutted eaves associated with the earliest form of this hipped roof design. Its rarity, however, (Criterion B), as a survivor of a once commonplace structure on the Victorian railway system enhances its value.

It is technically important (Criterion F) as an example of a machine having its origins in nineteenth century forms of railway safe working using mechanical interlocking and now superseded by digital technology.

It is socially important (Criterion G) for the value placed on it by the local community and on the railway station complex generally, as is demonstrated by the recent adaptative works.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Darebin - Darebin Heritage Review, Andrew Ward, 2000;
Hermes Number	24220
Property Number	

Physical Description 1

A standard Post Federation period timber framed signal box having upper and lower floors raised approximately 3 metres above track level. It is situated at the down end of the Flinders Street platform and has a flight of steps from the platform giving access to a landing at the upper floor (signalman's) level. There is a w.c. underneath the landing which also gives access to an elevated walkway used when required for direct communication with drivers. A small section oforiginal balustrade has survived by the entry door and is distinguished by its stop chamfered cross bracing. The roof is hipped and corrugated iron clad the wide eaves overhang being supported by struts from the principal posts.

There are four windows, two on either side, to the lower level and continuous sliding windows facing the track at the upper level which return around the end elevations to afford an uninterrupted view of the running lines. A sliding door gives access to the walkway.

At the upper floor level there is a 26 lever frame with 10 levers occupying the space originally required for the 47 lever machine installed in 1913. There is space for a stove since removed, a locker, hand basin and standard fitments. Interior linings are beaded timber with double bull nosed architraves. The lower floor gives access for fitters attending to the machine.

Integrity

Condition: Sound. Integrity: High, rodding removed but frame in situ, staircase rebuilt.

Comparative examples :

Timber signal boxes to this design equipped with cam and tappet machines were once commonplace throughout the Victorian Railways network. Today, examples survive at Creswick (1913: 35 levers), Epsom Road (Flemington Racecourse branch -1925: 15 levers), Frankston (1922: 79 levers), North Geelong A (1922: 53 levers), North Geelong B (1921: 50 levers), Ringwood (1926: 68 levers), Sunshine (1914: 80 levers), Wallan? (1916). Of the four surviving examples within the metropolitan area, Fairfield is the oldest. It is the equal oldest with Creswick at the State level. The frame at Fairfield is larger than Creswick but smaller than Frankston, the North Geelong boxes, Ringwood and Sunshine. Sunshine has the largest frame (80 levers) with Ringwood second by one (79 levers). In architectural terms, only Creswick and Sunshine have strutted eaves. The elevation of the upper levels on an exposed cross-braced frame is uncommon, comparing with Sunshine and earlier boxes in the Ballarat area. Tappet locking appears to have been introduced with the Ballarat A box in 1910 (118 levers) and continued to be incorporated in new installations until the early 1960s.

Historical Australian Themes

3. Developing local, regional and national economies
3.7 Moving goods and people
3.7.3.1 Building and maintaining railways

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