
Old Darlington Bridge & Abutments



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Location

Beside Hamilton Highway crossing of Mt Emu Creek,, DARLINGTON VIC 3271 - Property No B7003

Municipality

CORANGAMITE SHIRE

Level of significance

State

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 15, 2005

The pair of stone abutments and four wing walls with integrated cast-iron panels as parapets, situated on

opposite banks of the Mt Emu Creek on an earlier route of the Hamilton Highway, are historically, scientifically and aesthetically significant at State level. This bridge was originally a seven-span timber-beam road bridge, with timber deck and side rails supported by timber piers on bluestone-masonry dwarf piers, with substantial bluestone-masonry abutments and wingwalls topped by cast-iron parapets at each end. Only the masonry abutments and wing walls, with cast-iron elements, remain today. It is possible that the masonry dwarf piers may also survive.

Historically, these artifacts represent a very rare surviving example of an engineering response to the great state-wide flood phenomenon of 1870. Those floods devastated traditional timber-beam and laminated-timber-arch bridges at many Victorian main-road crossings, and caused municipal and government engineers to consider viable alternatives such as wrought-iron girder bridges. Surviving examples of bridges built as responses to the great 1870 floods are few, and invariably they lack their original timber fabric (for example Glenmona Bridge at Bung Bong; Wilks Creek Bridge near Marysville, Alexandra Bridge at Campbell's Creek).

The only other known Victorian example of substantial stone-masonry abutments and wing walls incorporating cast-iron parapet panels are at the old Eilerslie (Letts Ford) Bridge, and these were designed by the same Mortlake Shire engineer three years earlier. That Eilerslie Bridge of 1867 also survives today, but only its masonry abutments and wing walls with integral cast-iron parapet panels, along with two stone-masonry dwarf piers (and possibly an occasional timber-pier stay), are original features of what was once an exceptionally strong, ornate and expensive strutted-corbel timber bridge. Eilerslie Bridge's successful defiance of the freak Hopkins River floods of 1870, led to Mortlake Shire modelling its new main-road bridge at Darlington on the Eilerslie design. However, Darlington Bridge was not a simple replica. It was broader than Eilerslie Bridge, and the shape and ornamentation of its masonry wing walls are different, as also are the cast-iron parapet panels. In scientific or technological terms, this use of cast-iron panels as integral parapet members in the bluestone-masonry wing walls is extremely rare in Victoria. This feature drew criticisms of 'extravagance' from shire councillors at Darlington in 1871, and its use was then defended in terms of lower cost rather than aesthetic superiority. These integrated cast-iron parapets of Darlington Bridge distinguish it structurally from almost all other surviving examples of colonial Victorian bridges with stone-masonry abutments and wing walls, with the only known equivalent examples at Eilerslie being of a different (heavier, and more curved) design. The delicate iron panels at Darlington provide the best extant examples of this feature.

Darlington Bridge's masonry wing walls with their cast-iron parapet panels are also ornamental and of superior construction. Despite the disappearance of the bridge's once-handsome timber-beam superstructure and tall timber piers, the twin stone-masonry and cast-iron artifacts on either bank of Mt Emu Creek adjacent to the historic Elephant Bridge Hotel remain things of beauty beside the modern highway.

Classified: 02/08/1999

Hermes Number 67817

Property Number

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/>