The Bridges on Castlemaine - Maldon Railway

B6981 Muckleford Creek bridge

Location

between Mile Post 79 and Milepost 85, Castlemaine and Maldon Railway,, MALDON VIC 3463 - Property No B6981

Municipality

MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE

Level of significance

State

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 15, 2005

The bridges on the Maldon line are historically, scientifically and aesthetically significant at the state level as the most representative sequence of small to medium sized branch line railway bridges constructed by the Victorian Railways in the nineteenth century to survive today. The collection of bridges demonstrate more about the diversity in type, size, visual form and function of railway bridges constructed on branch lines in Victoria than any other surviving sequence of bridges.
The six timber bridges and one iron bridge demonstrate the original sequence of railway bridges constructed in 1884 from the Castlemaine end of the line; none have been replaced by culverts or rebuilt into a different type of bridge.
The bridges illustrate the policy adopted by the Victorian Railways in the early 1870's to reduce railway construction costs by building all new bridges from timber, except where special circumstances required the use of "more permanent" materials. Initially all bridges on the Maldon line were to be constructed in timber, but after

the Castlemaine Borough Council requested that a 'more suitable bridge' be constructed over Maldon Road, the iron girder bridge was built.
The collection demonstrates the different economic and engineering principles involved in the use of timber bridges compared with bridges constructed of more 'permanent' materials. Although cheaper to construct, the timber bridges required more frequent and expensive on-going maintenance than the iron girder bridge. Timber bridges were designed to allow individual structural components to be replaced as the need arose, while the design of the iron girder bridge assumes most components will be 'permanent'.
As major items of infrastructure, the bridge contributed significantly to the social, economic and political impact the Maldon line had on the inhabitants of Castlemaine and the Maldon district. The bridges were an essential element in making the railway the first reliable and efficient all weather transport system that linked Maldon to Castlemaine and beyond. Even the disastrous floods in January 1889 disrupted train services on the Maldon line for only three days while the Muckleford Creek bridge was repaired. Six months later the opening of a new larger bridge over the Muckleford Creek made the Maldon line virtually flood proof.
The six timber bridges are among the oldest surviving timber bridges built by the Victorian Railways, and collectively demonstrate more about the structural diversity and evolution of small to medium sized timber railway bridges in Victoria from 1884 to 1976 than any other group of bridges.
* All bridges date from 1884 when the Maldon line opened, except the bridge over Muckleford Creek that was constructed new in 1889 to replace a smaller, indadequate bridge.
* The bridges contain the best variety of structural elements, dating from 1884, found in any surviving group of timber bridges, and form a direct physical link with the earliest timber bridge technologies experimented with by the Victorian Railways between 1872 and 1877.
* The structural histories recorded in the bridge maintenance files are the most detailed for any similar bridges of a comparable age.
* The bridge collection is exceptional because it not only contains bridges large enough to impress and interest most people, but also includes small and visually insignificant bridges that were once common but are now extremely rare and usually overlooked. The bridges range in length from 55 feet to 540 feet (16.8 to 164.6m), and in maximum height from 5 to 22 feet (1.52 to 6.71m).
In particular:-
. 50% of all timber bridges (i.e. over 1000 bridges) constructed by the Victorian Railways were no higher than 5 feet (1.52m). No 7 bridge in the collection was the only bridge recorded in the trust timber bridge survey to be no higher than 5 feet, and had been individually classified as a bridge of state significance.
. The two longitudinal decked timber bridges are rare surviving exmaples of this once most common type of bridge that accounted for 74% of all timber bridges constructed by the Victorian Railways. Today almost all longitudinal decked bridges have been filled in, replaced by culverts, converted to another type of bridge, or lie decaying without a future on a disused railway line.
The timber bridges demonstrate the fundamental role Victoria's extensive hardwood resources had on the ability of the colony of Victoria to rapidly develop an extended railway system under the "Octopus Acts" of the 1880's.
The significance of the Maldon line bridge collection is increased by the close proximity of the Bendigo main line, where the bridges demonstrate the original 1856 policy of the Victorian Railways to construct all bridges of permanent materials.
The significance of the bridges is enhanced by their pesence on the short, 10-mile (16km) long, heritage rich Maldon branch line. Built in 1884 to service the gold mining town of Maldon, the 10 mile branch line terminated at Maldon. Even when the railway was extended a further 10 miles (16km) to Shelbourne, Maldon station retained the characteristics of a small terminal station. The early insignificance of the railway resulted in virtually no modernization of the line or its infrastructure. When the line closed in 1976 its major items of outstanding heritage significance combined with its short length resulted in the Maldon line being selected for restoration and preservation as a working museum by a group of railway enthusiasts. Today the Castlemaine and Maldon Railway Preservation Society have restored half of the Castlemaine to Maldon railway. Every week tourists experience the historic railway items and heritage classified structures at the Maldon end of the line in the context of an operating 'steam-era' railway museum. The restored section includes Muckleford Creek (No. 8) bridge, which is the longest all timber bridge built by the Victorian Railways still in railway service today.
When the second half of the Maldon line is restored, the remaining bridges will have a future as they demonstrate their original function as operational infrastructure on a 'steam-era' railway, and will allow modern generations to experience the lights and sounds of steam trains crossing a variety of timber bridges and steam railway technologies once played in the transportation needs of Victoria.
Classified: 07/06/1999

Hermes Number 69245

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/