
Burchett Creek Bridge



B7057 Burchett Creek Bridge
(Google Earth image)

Location

Old Caramut-Hexham Road, beside Hamilton Highway,, CARAMUT VIC 3274 - Property No B7057

Municipality

MOYNE SHIRE

Level of significance

State

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1856

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 23, 2007

The disused Burchett's Creek Bridge is historically, scientifically and aesthetically significant at State level. It is the best-preserved and most structurally-original Victorian all-timber bridge to survive from the colonial era. Although the bridge is situated on what was the original road between Melbourne and Portland, most human traffic and produce between these places would have utilised coastal shipping, and it is likely that the main traffic on the road was regional, and directed to the Port of Warrnambool via Caramut and Woolsthorpe. Although now impossible to date exactly, this bridge is of the period before the Depression of 1893 checked bridge construction generally, and is most likely to belong to the later 1870s when the Hexham-Caramut Road was first officially

elevated to Main Road status.

The site is enhanced by what appears to be the substantial remains of an earlier bluestone ford beneath the bridge. This unusually well-constructed ford of squared bluestone probably represents the original era of improvements to the Portland Road. The remains of the two earliest phases of stream crossing works - fords and timber bridges - at the same crossing, is rare and important. The location of the place on one of Victoria's earliest roads, which links Victoria's two first places of permanent European settlement, adds considerably to this significance.

Of surviving timber bridges of this colonial style, based on traditional European bridge-carpentry patterns, the Burchett's Creek Bridge is by far the best of its type in terms of its structural integrity and its overall condition. Despite its extreme rarity today, it represents a very popular design of rural colonial Victorian timber road bridge, illustrations of similar structures being common in early lithographs and photographs of our pastoral districts. Very many ageing and decrepit examples of this style of colonial timber bridge were inherited by the Country Roads Board when it first took over responsibility for rural main-road bridges circa 1913.

It is a three-span timber-beam bridge on timber piers and timber abutments, with squared-timber beams and a transverse-timber deck, heavy diagonally-spliced squared-timber gravel beams, and the remnants of timber side-rails which feature shaped posts with tenons. It is a relatively low-level bridge with a deck length of 13.2 metres and a deck width of 6 metres, and it possesses a slightly curved or 'humped' profile. This hump, a technique once commonly employed to minimise floodwater damage to timber bridges, is now very rare. The timber deck has been covered with gravel in traditional colonial main-road style, and later had bitumen surfacing. Heavy squared-timber caps at the top of timber piers have ogee-shaped ends, and the corbels above the piers are of classical ogee shape. The impression of sturdy construction is further enhanced by the unusually heavy-duty squared-timber gravel beams at each kerb-side. These hand-crafted gravel beams are strengthened and visually enhanced by neat diagonally-spliced joints, once common but extremely rare today. Its short spans, and extremely long corbels are particularly unusual. No other surviving bridge is known to retain a set of 'caps' with decorative ogee-shaped ends. Its raking or fender piles are also scarce today. It has no corbels at the abutments. Aesthetically, this very compact and well-designed timber structure set amidst rolling grasslands provides exquisite profile views to passers-by on the modern Hamilton Highway. It has been constructed to give the impression of a gently curving timber arch, and its beautifully shaped large squared-timber corbels contribute much to the attractive profile views. The Burchett's Creek Bridge provides our best remaining opportunity to experience the visual impact of ordinary traditional colonial bridge craftsmanship in real life, rather than in book-illustration form.

Classified: 05/06/2000

Other Names Nt T.B.R No 2538,

Hermes Number 69371

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/>