
MCCORMACK'S BATTERY AND CYANIDE WORKS

Location

MCCORMICKS ROAD FOSTERVILLE, GREATER BENDIGO CITY

Municipality

GREATER BENDIGO CITY

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7724-0101

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 14, 2023

What is significant?

The McCormack's battery and cyanide works site comprises an excellent example of a late nineteenth-century battery and cyanide treatment facility. The site has the potential to contain historical archaeological features, deposits or artefacts associated with the Fosterville gold field.

How is it significant?

The site is of local historical and scientific significance.

Why is it significant?

Gold mining in Fosterville can be characterised as a landscape of boom and bust. Many of the companies were small scale, made very little money, and the Fosterville area was colloquially referred to as the "Poor Man's Goldfield" (Snoek 1988). Gold miners had to rely on the resources in their immediate vicinity, and the use of pug and hewn timber logs to create the foundation for the stamp battery and the use of local materials in the cyanide vats lends to this notion.

The stamp batteries were available to the public. Miners would excavate materials, have their ore crushed at the battery, and in some cases, generate wealth from the gold extraction. From these results, over time these parties would develop their own mining sites based on these profits and establish their own machinery and battery sites. Without the McCormack's battery site, it is possible that many of these private parties would have not expanded and developed as quickly as they did.

The cyanide works is of historical and scientific significance for its association with early 20th century industrial scale gold mining in regional Victoria. The cyanide works allowed for miners to repurpose their tailings and

extract as much gold as possible.

Gold mining in Fosterville was not as lucrative as other goldfields (in comparison to places such as Bendigo and Ballarat); however, despite this the miners managed to implement the latest mining techniques through a combination of ingenuity and utilisation of local resources (Snoek 1988, p.10). The cyanide works site is representative of this adaptation of new technology in the Fosterville goldfields and has the potential to yield further information about the resourcefulness of the local goldminers.

Interpretation
of Site

Mid-19th century: Gold was discovered in Fosterville in the early 1850s. Small scale mining commenced at this time. Late 19th century: The McCormack's stamp battery was constructed prior to August 1896, east of Hunt's line and operated as a public crushings between 1896 and 1903. The township of Fosterville was formalised in 1896 and works on a large water race commenced to facilitate the crushings for the expanded diggings. Early 20th century: A cyanide works was constructed adjacent to McCormack's battery in 1902. The township of Fosterville began to decline in 1903 as many of the larger mines closed; however, cyanide works continued to operate until 1939. It is unclear when McCormack's cyanide works ceased operations; however, it was likely in keeping with the closures across Fosterville in 1939. Mid-20th century: The water races and dams established for mining were reused for agricultural activities. Late 20th century: Gold mining was reestablished in Fosterville resulting in extensive disturbance to the wider landscape. The site appears relatively undisturbed. Modern gold mining activities continue within the area to the present day. The VHI site, McCormack's Battery and Cyanide Works (H7724-0101) represents two phases of gold mining operations at Fosterville. The batteries were established prior to 1896 and operated as a public crushing for parties across Fosterville. The batteries were some of the first operating in the area, and consistently crushed ore throughout 1896 to 1903, despite known water shortages in the area. The earthen ramp, situated behind the two rows of batteries was built using pug and timber supports. This ramp would have allowed machinery operators to drop ore directly into the ore feeder, so it could be crushed by the stamps. A figure demonstrating this process has been included (Figure 5). Fosterville was a remote town, and miners had to rely on the resources readily available to them if they could not afford to get the supplies carted in. The use of pug and timber in the stamp battery foundations demonstrates the ingenuity required for operating gold mining machinery in a remote setting. A large amount of power would have been required to operate the twin 10-head stamp batteries. The boiler and boiler house foundations are all that remains of the original boiler, which would have powered the steam driven stamp batteries. It is likely that both the batteries and the boiler were sold to recoup any losses when mining declined in Fosterville. The second phase of the site commenced in 1902 with the establishment of the cyanide works. Based on the dates provided, it is likely that there was a time where the cyanide works and stamp batteries operated simultaneously. The cyanide works were a complex gravity fed system that utilised the earthen ramp that had already been constructed for the stamp batteries. A small agitation vat sat at the highest point and drained into the rectangular percolation vats. The rectangular vats appear to be constructed from local materials, as evidenced by the coarseness of the concrete and the large quartz inclusions. The slime solution was treated and drained into zinc boxes for gold precipitation. To reuse as much of the zinc as possible, the waste was syphoned into evaporation tanks. The process of cyanidation was introduced in Victoria in 1896, and within six years of its introduction this incredibly complex and dangerous cyanide works was established and operating at Fosterville, allowing miners to extract as much gold as possible from the ore that they excavated. During the site inspection, it was revealed that the current spatial data for the site extent is inaccurate. A revised site extent and location has been provided in Map 1.

Other Names Site 12- McCormick Battery,

Hermes
Number 8404

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/>