Heritage Overlay No.:	**042**
Citation No.:	**066**
Place:	**Diggers Rest Railway Station & Platforms, Calder Highway**

Other Names of Place:	None
Location:	Old Calder Highway, Diggers Rest
Critical Dates:	c.1859; 1928.
Existing Heritage Listings:	National Trust (State)
Local Historical Theme:	Transport
Recommended Level of Significance:	LOCAL (station building); STATE (platforms)

Statement of Significance:

The Diggers Rest Railway Station, located on the Old Calder Highway, Diggers Rest, is significant as a moderately intact example of an interwar station building representing a contemporary style of railway station buildings for the period. It was built in 1928 as part of the new level crossing controls necessitated by the rise of the motor vehicle, and appears to be in good condition. The place is also a legacy of the infrastructure development of the historic Melbourne and Echuca railway (1859-1864). The bluestone platforms are part of the earliest fabric of this historic railway, probably dating to c.1858-59.

The Diggers Rest Railway Station, located on the Old Calder Highway, is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC D2). Although slightly altered, the railway station building demonstrates some original design qualities for an interwar station building. These qualities include the long hipped roof form, together with the hipped roof that projects at the side at one

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end. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the asymmetrical composition, single storey height, face brick wall construction, malthoid tile roof cladding, face brick chimney with a soldier course capping, broad eaves, cantilevering skillion verandah supported by steel columns connected to curved steel brackets and beams, galvanised corrugated steel verandah roof cladding, and the window and door openings (but not the framed construction). The railway platforms, including the coursed squared rubble bluestone walls and concrete surface, also contribute to the significance of the place**.**

The Diggers Rest Railway Station, located on the Old Calder Highway, is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4, B2). It expresses the history of the town from its inception as a consequence of the Mount Alexander goldrushes, and in the early twentieth century. It also demonstrates the need for better crossing controls that were associated with the rise of the motor car in the early twentieth century.

Despite the partial reconstruction on the down side, the bluestone platform is historically significant at the STATE level as the most intact of the earliest station platforms (with Sydenham and Sunbury) to operate on the Melbourne to Bendigo railway line, which was Victoria's first government railway and subsequently its 'Main Line'; and as an expression of this railway's use of bluestone, and the high construction standards used on the line, which were never repeated, and which made it the greatest public work in Australia up to that time. The Melbourne to Echuca Railway is classified at the State level by the National Trust, which deems all the line's original fabric (such as bluestone platforms) to be of State significance.

Overall, the Diggers Rest Railway Station, located on the Old Calder Highway, is of LOCAL significance, while the bluestone platform is of STATE significance.

Description:

The Diggers Rest Railway Station, located on the Old Calder Highway, Diggers Rest, has two platforms with coursed, squared rubble bluestone walls and concrete surface. In late 2004 the 'down' or Bendigo platform was cut back and rebuilt by Regional Rail Link as part of its works on the Bendigo 'fast rail' project.[1] The four operational semaphore signals at each end of the platforms (two at each end) have also been decommissioned and removed as part of the Bendigo Line Fast Rail Project. The platforms appear to reflect the original construction. At the rear is an asphalt car park with mature eucalyptus plantings.

The asymmetrical, single storey, face brick, interwar railway station building is characterised by a long hipped roof form, together with another hipped roof that projects at the side at one end. These roof forms are clad in early malthoid tiles. An early face brick chimney with a soldier course capping adorns the roofline. Broad overhangs are features of the eaves.

Another early feature of the design is the cantilevering skillion verandah. It is supported by steel columns connected to curved steel brackets and beams. The verandah roof is clad in galvanised corrugated steel.

The aluminium framed windows and doors have been introduced, probably replacing original timber framed openings. Internally, the original spaces have been altered, partly as a consequence of previous fire damage.

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[1] Regional Rail Link, 'Rail Construction Update', Edition 3, February 22nd 2005.

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The signal frame and levers have been removed from the station signalbay. The tunnel of original (1902) signal box is visible under the Up platform (Up end).[2]

The former chaff mill sidings have been removed.

History:

The Diggers Rest Station is situated on the 'Melbourne to Mt Alexander and Murray River Railway', whose planning was commenced in 1852 as a Government assisted private venture. Failure to raise the huge funds necessary resulted in the company's assets being taken over by the Victorian Government in 1856. After debates about the best route of the line, construction was commenced in 1857. The private company had originally planned to align the railway along the route of the Mt Macedon Road through Bulla to Sunbury. The Government re-routed the line through Diggers Rest,[3] after which it made a generous loop through Clarke's Special Survey before rejoining the road near Gisborne. The first stage of the railway - to Sunbury (with a branch to Williamstown) - was opened in 1859. The railway reached Bendigo in 1862, and Echuca in 1864.[4]

With the Geelong-Ballarat line, the Melbourne-Echuca railway was the colony's first government railway, and first trunk-line. While providing access to the Bendigo goldfields it also tapped the Riverina wool trade for the port of Williamstown. It has always been known as the 'Main Line' of Victoria's railway system.[5]

The Bendigo railway was the greatest public work in Australia up to that time and, with the Geelong to Ballarat line, remains unequalled in the monumentality of its engineering and the quality of its buildings.[6] With the Geelong to Ballarat line this double-line railway remains unequalled in its monumental engineering and in the quality of its buildings. The most obvious evidence of the standard employed is the use of stone and brick in construction, and the great engineering works, such as the spectacular bridges, extensive earthworks (to maintain a relatively level grade), and tunnels.[7] The Mt Alexander line employed thousands and cost a colossal £47,806 per mile.[8] An inquiry was afterwards held into its extravagant cost, as a consequence of which it was not until the 1870s that any major new railways were built in Victoria, and then at a much lesser expense.

The first stage of the railway to Sunbury was celebrated in a grand opening in January 1859. Towns such as Sunbury briefly flourished until the next terminus, or stage, of the railway was opened. Not only construction gangs, but also postal, police and commercial services were established temporarily as travellers used the train to travel as much of the journey to the goldfields as possible. The same phenomenon occurred at the 'Keilor Road' or 'Keilor Plains' (now Sydenham) Station, where coaches met the passengers and mail to convey them to Ballarat.[9]

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[2] Andrew Waugh, personal comment.

[3] Symonds, IW, *Bulla Bulla*, p.94.

[4] Andrew Ward & Associates, *Study of Historic Railway Buildings and Structures for V/Line*, (V/Line, March, 1988), pp.10-17.

[5] McCann, J, Churchward, M, *Victorian Steampower, An Illustrated Social History*, (Victoria Press, Scienceworks, Melbourne, 1994), pp. 50, 147.

[6] Harrigan, LJ, *Victorian Railways to 62* (Victorian Railways, Melbourne), p 24.

[7] Ward, (1988), *op cit*, p 18.

[8] McCann, Churchward, *op cit*, p 45.

[9] Starr, J, *Melton: Plains of Promise* (Melton Shire Council, c.1985), p.147; Chandler, *op cit*, p.159; see also *Victorian Municipal Directory*, 1883, for routes; Luebbers, 'An Archaeological Investigation of the National Hotel: a Mid Nineteenth Century Roadhouse on the Calder Highway between Millett Road and South Gisborne Victoria' (Report prepared for VicRoads, Melbourne, Nov.1994), pp 5, 7

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In his memoirs carrier John Chandler recalls that the railway to Diggers Rest was operating in this way. When he came back to Melbourne from the goldfields (c.1858-59) he noted that 'the railway was made as far as Digger's Rest; most carriers were loading from there.'[10] Government records indicate that the station was opened for passengers on 10th February 1859. A goods shed was erected in July 1859.[11]

In March 1860 Spiers and Pond were awarded the contract for the lease of the railway refreshment room.[12] The impressive station built at Diggers Rest was an indication of its importance, but this importance was short-lived. Situated right on the main road to the diggings, Diggers Rest probably competed well with Sunbury as a rail/road interchange, but its status as the effective terminus of the line lasted only until 1861 when the line was opened to Woodend (which, unlike Sunbury, was also situated on the main Mt Alexander Road).[13] Diggers Rest consequently became, and remains, a minor station.

The Government had not anticipated or surveyed a township at Diggers Rest, whose original core was the famous Diggers Rest hotel; this roaring goldrush era establishment, which was also a changing station for three daily coaches, had been built on land already alienated by the Crown.[14] When the railway reached Bendigo in 1862 the impact on roadside towns was immediate and dramatic. Although extensive road and bridge improvements had been undertaken, Mt Alexander Road could not now compete with the speed and comfort of the new railway. All along Mt Alexander Road gold escort (police) stations were closed, and the values of roadside hotels plummetted. The tiny Diggers Rest township gradually moved away from the hotel towards the crossing of the railway and the road at Diggers Rest station.
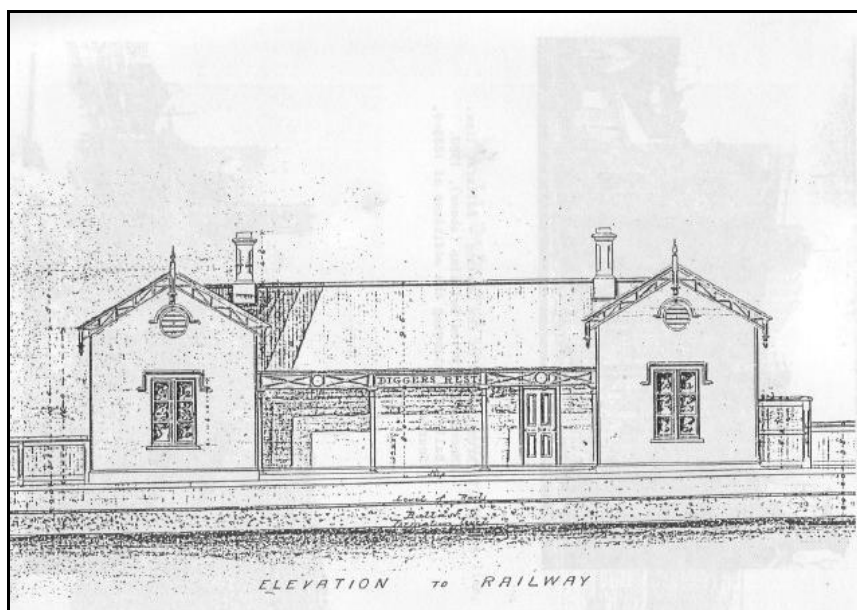
The original Diggers Rest Railway Station, now demolished (nd). Contract books tell that the 'officers' quarters' at Diggers Rest were relocated to Lancefield Junction (Clarkefield), with alterations.[15]

[10] Chandler, *op cit*, p.129

[11] Waugh, Andrew, 'Victorian Signalling Histories No.8: Diggers Rest' (Version 1.1, September 2001).

[12] *ibid*

[13] *ibid*

[14] Parish Plan, Section 9, Parish of Holden.

[15] Ward, *op cit*, p.19. The source of the drawing was V-Line.

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The station itself developed a merely local function, servicing the nearby farming community. From the 1870s until the early twentieth century it also served greyhound enthusiasts: Australia's first St Ledger Stakes was held on Sir WJ Clarke's Diggers Rest property in 1874, and this eventually became the site of an enclosed Plumpton, or greyhound racing track. But these busy occasions were the exception: in 1904 a lamp with a red flap was provided for passengers to signal the 6.30 pm Melbourne train.[16] In 1910 the Victorian Municipal Directory lists Diggers Rest as a separate township for the first time, noting only its "station, three hotels". In 1912 the Barrie family opened the Austral Grain and Produce chaff mill at Diggers Rest.[17] This mill (later called the Schutt and Barrie mill) was situated beside the railway, which was critical to this industry. In 1922 a "Mechanics Institute" (local hall?) was listed in the Municipal Directory for the first time.[18] A store, garage, school and houses were also established near the station.

The original station was demolished, perhaps when the present station was built. It is said to have been reconstructed across the road as the Diggers Rest General Store.[19] Research by the Signalling Records Society indicates that the present station was built as part of the introduction of interlocked segmental wheel-operated gates to control the Calder Highway (Mt Alexander Road) railway crossing in August 1928.[20] Previously the signal box had been situated on the other (Up) end of the Up platform. The new station signal bay, adjacent to the crossing, incorporated a 16 lever frame. The interocked gates were replaced with automatic booms in 1982.[21] In 1989 the chaff mill goods siiding was disconnected from the Main Line, and crossovers abolished. The signal lever and frame operate the four semaphore signals at at the station, controlled by a double line block (telegraph) system, one of the last sections of this type of control still operating in Victoria.

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Melton Historical Themes: 'Transport', 'Community'

Known Comparable Example in Melton Shires:

The station building reflects the history of the town in the early twentieth century, and the rise of motor car and the need for better crossing controls at that time. A small farming hamlet gathered around the station in the late nineteenth to mid twentieth century. Some buildings and eucalypt plantings express this. The removal of the interlocked gates on the Calder Highway diminishes its context to a minor extent. Otherwise the building (exterior) and platforms are largely intact representations of their eras.

Diggers Rest, with Sydenham (then 'Keilor Road') Station and Sunbury Station, were the first operating stations on the Melbourne to Mt Alexander and Murray River Railway. None of these stations retains its original station building. Of these, Diggers Rest has the most intact

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[16] Waugh, *op cit*.

[17] *ibid*, pp.30-31. (This mill first appears in the *Victorian Municipal Directory* in 1915)

[18] Victorian Municipal Directories

[19] Context Pty Ltd, 'Regional Rail Link Bendigo Line Overall Works: Heritage Identification Report', (July 2003), p.32.

[20] Waugh, *op cit*. This explains why the present station does not appear in an architectural study of railway stations up to the mid 1920s (Ward, A, Donnelly, A, *Victoria's Railway Stations: An Architectural Survey* (Australian Railway Historical Society, March, 1982).

[21] Sinnatt, 'Level Crossing Protection', in *Somersault* (Vol 11, Sept. 1988), p.110

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platform: part of the up platform, and the whole of the down platform at Sydenham were recently demolished; at Sunbury only the down platform is of bluestone.[22]

The other comparable station in the Shire of Melton is Melton South (1884), which is also recommended for heritage overlay controls.

Condition:

Good

Integrity:

Moderately intact

Recommendations:

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

External Paint Controls:	*Yes*
Internal Alteration Controls:	*No*
Tree Controls:	*No*
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	*No*

Other Recommendations:

- The bluestone platforms date from the original construction of the railway, and are highy important for this association. They were recommended for inclusion in the (then) Government Buildings Register in Andrew Ward's 1988 V-Line Study,[23] but this recommendation for state level heritage controls was never considered (the subsequent study by R Beeston only considered sites already included in the GBR). The Melbourne to Echuca Railway is classified at the State level by the National Trust, which deems all the line's original fabric (such as bluestone platforms) to be of State significance.

- The Bendigo Regional Fast Rail Project has cut back the down platform c.400 mm, but retained and reinstate its bluestone facing.[24]

- As much as possible of the decommissioned historic signalling system should be retained, including the 16 lever 'A Pattern' frame in the signal box, associated rods and signal poles, (which should if possible be preserved *in situ* by rotating them 90 degrees, and/or moving them a few metres away from the track).

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[22] Context, *op cit*, p.32; Moloney, D, 'Review of Sunbury Railway Station Heritage Precinct'
19th September 2001 (City of Hume).

[23] Ward (1988), *op cit*, Vol. 1, Appendices.

[24] Regional Rail Link, 'Regional Fast Rail Project: Site Environmental Management Plan, Bendigo
Line' (Revision A, May 2004), Appendix 1.

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