

Identification and location

Name of Place: **Railway Bridge (Black Arch)**

Other Name Nicholson St. Rail overpass

Address Nicholson Street

Footscray

Place Identifier 22072

Heritage Significance city

Creation date(s): 1859, 1900c

Map (Melway) 43 D5

Boundary description the extent of the bridge, its abutments and approach embankments for 50 metres either side.

Local Government Area: Maribyrnong

Ownership Type state (PTC)

Description

Site Type: transport

Physical Description

Double track railway bridge with rusticated bluestone abutments including smooth ashlar string course, curved wing walls and single low relief pilasters on each abutment. The bridge girders appear to be modern replacements, while the road has been lowered to provide greater clearance and concrete kerbing added in part. The approach roads are unusual in the sharp entry and exit angles

Condition

In good condition

Integrity

The abutments are original although the bridge girder and deck may be later replacements or modifications

Context

On a minor road adjacent to Footscray Technical College which has resumed the original main approach, Nicholson Street, into its landscaped grounds.

Threats

none evident

History

The Melbourne - Geelong Railway was constructed in 1857 as a private venture, reaching only Newport initially, where passengers and goods were transferred to river boats at North Road for the final trip upstream to Melbourne. The Williamstown - Melbourne line was completed in 1859 as the first Government constructed railway. The Government had previously bought out the floundering Melbourne, Mount Alexander and Murray River Railway Company, in March 1856 and took over the building of the Williamstown line.

The first batch of contracts were awarded in June 1856 by the newly formed Victorian Railways Department. Contract details have not been found for the railway crossing at Nicholson Street Footscray, which also crossed a small creek (Billy Button Creek). It appears from later plans, (Borough of Footscray 1868, MMBW 1":160' Sewerage Plan) that this crossing was a minor culvert only about two metres wide. It still appears on the 1897 MMBW plan in this form, but by 1910, a more substantial bridge had been constructed to allow vehicles to cross under the railway. This work may have been carried out in conjunction with the reconstruction of Footscray Station, which required changes to grade on both the Williamstown and Bendigo Lines.

The bridge is known locally as the "Black Arch". A confusing nomenclature since it is not an arch, although the bluestone may provide the colour reference. Also another bridge has been referred to by locals as the "Black Arch". this is a more appropriate bluestone culvert at the south end of Duke Street over Stony Creek (q.v.), which is a substantial and sophisticated bluestone semicircular arched structure about three metres wide at the opening and more fitting of the name. One can only assume that the original crossing of Billy Button Creek, was a structure in this form and that the name has lived on well after the arch itself.

Thematic context

Australian Principal Theme

PAHT Subtheme:

Local Theme

Cultural Significance

The Nicholson Street bridge of historical and architectural significance to the City of Maribyrnong as a finely constructed bluestone bridge which represents the turn of the century improvements to road access beneath the railway lines and the importance of locally quarried bluestone. Even though not original to the construction of the line, the bluestone masonry demonstrates nineteenth century building and engineering techniques which are no longer practised. (Criteria B2&D2) The bridge is also of social value for the continuing public appreciation and tradition which appears to refer back to an earlier historical structure as evidenced by the popular but confusing name of the 'Black Arch'. (Criterion G1 & Criterion E1))

As part of the first Government railway in Victoria, one of the first country railways in Australia and a line built to British engineering standards with IK Brunel as supervising engineer (from England) this demonstrates the beginnings and origins of railway construction in Victoria. Criterion A4)

Comparative Examples

Similar in form to the Stony Creek bridge, Newport, but with a more simplified structural form. Characteristic of the several local bluestone railway structures.

Recommendations

Heritage Victoria Register

Register of the National Estate

National Trust Register

Maribyrnong Heritage Review - Industrial Places

Other Heritage Listings	<input type="text" value="WRIHS"/>
Planning Scheme Protection	<input type="text" value="Recommended"/>
External Paint Controls Apply?	<input type="text" value="Yes"/>
Internal Alteration Controls Apply?	<input type="text" value="N/A"/>
Tree Controls Apply?	<input type="text" value="No"/>
Included on the Victorian Heritage Register under the Act	<input type="text" value="No"/>
Are there Outbuildings or Fences not Exempt?	<input type="text" value="N/A"/>
Prohibited Uses may be Permitted?	<input type="text" value="N/A"/>

Recommendations

The following objectives relate to the Statement of Significance and the cited fabric or contributory elements.
To conserve and enhance the significant elements of the place.
To conserve and enhance the public view of these elements.
To ensure that new or altered elements within the place are visually recessive and related to the contributory elements.
To encourage continuation of the original use of the place.

Australian Heritage Commission Criteria

A4 Importance for their association with events, developments or cultural phases which have had a significant role in the human occupation and evolution of the nation, state, region or community.

As part of the first Government railway in Victoria, one of the first country railways in Australia and a line built to British engineering standards with IK Brunel as supervising engineer (from England) this demonstrates the beginnings and origins of railway construction in Victoria.

B2 Importance in demonstrating a distinctive way of life, custom, process, land-use, function or design no longer practised, in danger of being lost, or of exceptional interest.

Even though not original to the construction of the line, the bluestone masonry demonstrates nineteenth century building and engineering techniques which are no longer practised.

D2 Importance in demonstrating the principle characteristics of the range of human activities in the Australian environment (including way of life, custom, process, land-use, function, design or technique).

Both the role of the railways and the role of bluestone quarry men and masons, is exemplified in this bridge.

E1 Importance for a community for aesthetic characteristics held in high esteem or otherwise valued by the community.

The continuing local association of this structure by local people as the "Black Arch" demonstrates a long lived public esteem which has outlived the original cause.

G1 Importance as places highly valued by a community for reasons of religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations.

Local identification of this bridge as the Black Arch continues an historical association which may recall a much earlier predecessor and continues an oral tradition.

Documentation

References

Borough of Footscray 1868,
MMBW 1":160' Sewerage Plan 1897, 1910.
John Lack, *History of Footscray* and pers comm. on "Black Arch"

Data recording

Assessed By
Assessed Date: