

Identification and location

Name of Place: **Black Arch rail bridge**

Other Name

Address off **Sunshine Road**

Sunshine

Place Identifier **8821**

Heritage Significance *state*

Creation date(s): 1859 c. **Map (Melway)** 40 K3 map no. 24132

Boundary description The bridge itself and the bed of Stony Creek extending 20 metres in each direction.

Local Government Area: Cities of Brimbank and Maribyrnong

Ownership Type public

Description

Site Type: bridge

Physical Description

Rusticated rock faced bluestone single arch rail bridge with raised keystone and drafted string courses at the footings, the springing of the arch and the base of the parapet. Pilasters frame the semi-circular arch. Curved wing walls have recent concrete extensions and the original cobbled creek bed has been concreted in part. The bridge has been reinforced with sections of rail attached with tension bolts through the stonework. Additional tracks constructed in the 1960s are carried on a higher embankment with a concrete lined tunnel immediately to the north.

Condition

Good, although rail lines used as bracing are intrusive. Some graffiti.

Integrity

Intact

Context

Elaborate bluestone masonry distinguishes this bridge and compares with other work on the line, including culverts at Sydenham and St. Albans. To the north is the Hill reserve which takes in the route of the former Duke Street extension which ran under this bridge.

Threats

None known

History

Built as part of the first major Government-built railway line in the colony of Victoria which was pushed out to Castlemaine in 1859 and later to Bendigo (then known as Sandhurst). The stone arch was built to carry the rail over Stony Creek and the Duke Street extension which appears to have run along the cobblestone-lined creek bed for a short distance.

The Geelong line was built two years earlier by a private company. The construction of the Melbourne, Mount Alexander and Murray River Railway, also known as the Melbourne to Sandhurst line, involved the employment of hundreds of workers. The contract was awarded to Cornish & Co. at a cost of £3,356,937. It was the greatest public work in Victoria up to that time. The firm paid a deposit of £40,000 and started work near Footscray on 7 June 1858. The first stretch of line, Footscray to Sunbury, going through the Brimbank area, was 21 miles. This included the construction of this substantial bluestone railway bridge over Stony Creek, at present-day Sunshine, and also bluestone railway culverts in the St.Albans/Sydenham area. The contractors, Cornish and Bruce, brought out stone masons from England to work on the I.K. Brunel, one of Britain's leading railway engineers, was the Inspecting Officer supervising the contracts in England, so many aspects of the line's design, operation and construction were influenced by British practice and Brunel's individual railway philosophy, for example, wide tracks, generous earthworks, solid masonry, gentle grades. It was also very costly. The firm made rapid progress and completed work on a single track by 13 January 1859. On this day of great celebration, the Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Barklay, travelled on a special train going first to Williamstown, then through Footscray at 30 miles an hour and on to Sunbury. The Sunbury line was open for passenger traffic on 10 February 1859, with three trains from Melbourne to Sunbury a day and four trains from Sunbury to Melbourne. Workers completed a second line of rail to Sunbury and a goods service began on 11 July 1859. In October 1862 the line to Castlemaine and Bendigo was finished and officially opened.

Thematic context

Australian Principal Theme

PAHT Subtheme:

Local Theme

Cultural Significance

The Black Arch rail culvert is one of the most intact and least-modified early bluestone railway bridges in the region and part of the first major Government railway line. The distinctive stone work demonstrates the engineering and stonemasonry skills of the period while its setting allows the visual impact to be fully appreciated, but unfortunately, only from the south side. (Criteria B2 & D2) The scale and elaborate stonework, as well as its general form demonstrates the influence of imported British railway engineering and design standards at the onset of railway development in Australia. 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

Compares with the similar and contemporary but smaller stone culvert at Sydenham on the same line, while other stonework on this and the Williamstown line at the Stony Creek crossing, Nicholson Street bridge (also referred to by locals as the Black Arch q.v.) and the Maribyrnong River Bridge all demonstrate similar stylistic elements.

Recommendations

Maribyrnong Heritage Review - Industrial Places

Heritage Victoria Register	Recommended
Register of the National Estate	Recommended
National Trust Register	Yes - part of classification of
Other Heritage Listings	WRIHS
Planning Scheme Protection	Recommended
External Paint Controls Apply?	Yes
Internal Alteration Controls Apply?	N/A
Tree Controls Apply?	N/A
Included on the Victorian Heritage Register under the Act	No
Are there Outbuildings or Fences not Exempt?	N/A
Prohibited Uses may be Permitted?	N/A

Recommendations

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 conserve and enhance the visual relationships between the contributory 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.

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 quarrymen and masons, is exemplified in this bridge.

Documentation

References

St.Albans History Society, *Around and about St. Albans*, 1991.
Leo J. Harrigan, *Victorian Railways to '62*, Melbourne, n.d.[c.1963].

Data recording

Assessed By
Assessed Date: