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# RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION CAMP SITE

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## Location

21-25 SWIFT STREET SUNBURY, HUME CITY

## Municipality

HUME CITY

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7822-0712

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO64

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 31, 2005

Data has been updated as a result of the Outer Western Metro Project, Context, March 2010.

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|-----------------------------|---|
| Interpretation of Site      | <p>The previous site card (2003) records a dispersed scatter of glass, ceramic and metal fragments. These have been interpreted as the remains of domestic refuse dating to the recorded occupation of the camp between 1859 and 1862. No structural remains were identified.</p> <p>Surface artefacts were limited to a few metal fragments of early appearance, and the site contained modern refuse. However, a possible hearth site, comprising burnt rocks, which may relate to the construction camp was identified to the east in an area of disturbed ground.</p> |
| Archaeological Significance | <p>The site appears to have been heavily disturbed by recent construction activities in the surrounding area, and by more recent dumping. It is likely that ephemeral structural remains, of the kind likely to be left by a temporary camp of tents and huts, will have been destroyed. However, it is likely that intensive occupation will have deposited artefactual evidence which may survive below the ground surface.</p>   |
| Historical Significance     | <p>The site is of historical significance for its association with the Sunbury Hill Railway Bridge, a major component of the bridge works of the Melbourne to Echuca Railway line, which was opened soon after the formation of the Victorian Railways Department in 1856. The site may also produce artefacts relating to the Railway Construction Camp occupation.</p>  |
| Other Names                 | RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION CAMP,  |
| Hermes Number               | 12908   |
| Property Number             |   |

## History

The Melbourne, Mount Alexander and Murray River Railway Company was established in 1852 to construct the main line from Melbourne to Mount Alexander and the River Murray (Echuca). The government took over the project when the company was unable to raise sufficient funds to build the railway.

The Railway Bridge at Sunbury Hill was built by Cornish and Bruce under the direction of chief engineer G.C Derbyshire. The project was the largest building enterprise in the colony at the time, and large temporary construction camps were established at Sunbury and Riddell's Creek to accommodate accommodate the 2000 men and 600 horses required. Wives and families lived in canvas or corrugated huts, and many other people established shops, eating and boarding houses, and hotels to service the workers.

The first section of the line, from Melbourne to Sunbury, was opened by the Victorian Railways Department on January the 13th, 1859, but when the line was officially opened the Sunbury Hill bridge had not been constructed and a temporary timber structure had to serve in its place. The delay was the result of a number of strikes during 1858-61 against the principle of sub-contracting, assaults on the eight hour day, and the lowering of wages. The massive size of the railway contract and the importance of stone bridges such as this one saw the line become the focus of the battle by stonemasons to protect their working conditions. The contractors eventually won the struggle, partly by importing indentured masons from Germany who, despite establishing a partial allegiance with the local masons, were employed in the construction of bridges on the line, and eventually the established levels of wages.

*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/>