

# MURTOA WATER TOWER



FORMER RAILWAY WATER  
TOWER SOHE 2008



1 former railway water tower  
comyn avenue murtoa front  
view

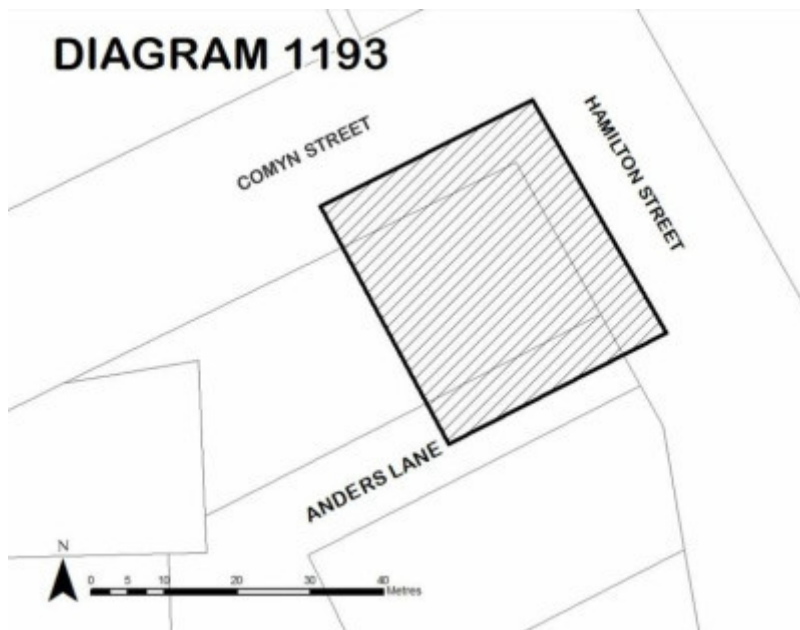


DIAGRAM 1193

## Location

COMYN STREET AND HAMILTON STREET MURTOA, YARRIAMBIACK SHIRE

## Municipality

YARRIAMBIACK SHIRE

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1193

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO41

## VHR Registration

July 25, 1996

## Amendment to Registration

August 17, 2023

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 1, 2025

Murtoa Water Tower is located on Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagalk Country.

## What is significant?

The Murtoa Water Tower, constructed and opened in 1886, a twelve-metre high, four-storey cylindrical brick tower with a riveted wrought-iron water tank at the top and lifting gear with inbuilt pulley system on the fourth floor.

## How is it significant?

The Murtoa Water Tower is of historical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

**Criterion A:** Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

**Criterion D:** Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places and objects.

## Why is it significant?

The Murtoa Water Tower is historically significant for its association with the growth of Victoria's steam train network in the nineteenth century. It demonstrates the importance of water-related infrastructure for railway steam engines and the role of the Victorian Railways in its engineering and construction. Water towers were

central to the expansion of the colony's railway network and Murtoa was an important 'water station' on the Serviceton line which connected to Adelaide in 1887.

(Criterion A)

The Murtoa Water Tower is significant as a notable nineteenth-century water tower demonstrating fine engineering and construction skills to provide a gravity-fed reticulated water supply across a flat landscape. The 182 kilolitre (40,000 gallon) wrought-iron tank is supported by a four-storey brick cylindrical building which ensured sufficient water pressure for the distribution of water pumped from Lake Marma to the nearby Murtoa Railway Station and throughout the town

(Criterion D)

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

**Places of worship:** In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must [notify](#) the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

**Subdivision/consolidation:** Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

### Specific Exemptions:

The works and activities below are not considered to cause harm to the cultural heritage significance of the Murtoa Water Tower subject to the guidelines and conditions below:

#### **Concordia College Belltower Spire**

##### *Belltower spire*

1. All repair and maintenance
2. Removal

##### *Metal support and brick paved area*

3. All repair and maintenance
4. Replacement like for like
5. Removal

##### *Interpretative panel*

6. All repair and maintenance
7. Replacement like for like and updating of text and images on the panel

## 8. Removal

### **Public seating and picnic furniture**

9. All repair and maintenance
10. Replacement like for like

### **Water Tower Museum sign**

11. All repair and maintenance

### **Roadways**

12. Repair and maintenance of existing roadways, gutter, footpaths and nature strips, including road re-surfacing.

## **Guidelines and Conditions for Specific Exemptions**

### **Guidelines**

1. Where there is an inconsistency between permit exemptions specific to the registered place or object ('specific exemptions') established in accordance with either section 49(3) or section 92(3) of the Act and general exemptions established in accordance with section 92(1) of the Act specific exemptions will prevail to the extent of any inconsistency.
2. In specific exemptions, words have the same meaning as in the Act, unless otherwise indicated. Where there is an inconsistency between specific exemptions and the Act, the Act will prevail to the extent of any inconsistency.
3. Nothing in specific exemptions obviates the responsibility of a proponent to obtain the consent of the owner of the registered place or object, or if the registered place or object is situated on Crown Land the land manager as defined in the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*, prior to undertaking works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions.
4. If a Cultural Heritage Management Plan in accordance with the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* is required for works covered by specific exemptions, specific exemptions will apply only if the Cultural Heritage Management Plan has been approved prior to works or activities commencing. Where there is an inconsistency between specific exemptions and a Cultural Heritage Management Plan for the relevant works and activities, Heritage Victoria must be contacted for advice on the appropriate approval pathway.
5. Specific exemptions do not constitute approvals, authorisations or exemptions under any other legislation, Local Government, State Government or Commonwealth Government requirements, including but not limited to the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth). Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to obtain relevant planning, building or environmental approvals from the responsible authority where applicable.
6. Care should be taken when working with heritage buildings and objects, as historic fabric may contain dangerous and poisonous materials (for example lead paint and asbestos). Appropriate personal protective equipment should be worn at all times. If you are unsure, seek advice from a qualified heritage architect, heritage consultant or local Council heritage advisor.
7. The presence of unsafe materials (for example asbestos, lead paint etc) at a registered place or object does not automatically exempt remedial works or activities in accordance with this category. Approvals under Part 5 of the Act must be obtained to undertake works or activities that are not expressly exempted by the below specific exemptions.
8. All works should be informed by a Conservation Management Plan prepared for the place or object. The Executive Director is not bound by any Conservation Management Plan, and permits still must be obtained for works suggested in any Conservation Management Plan.

### **Conditions**

1. All works or activities permitted under specific exemptions must be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents harm to the registered place or object. Harm includes moving, removing or damaging any part of the registered place or object that contributes to its cultural heritage significance.
2. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the registered place are revealed relating to its cultural heritage significance, including but not limited to historical archaeological remains, such as features, deposits or artefacts, then works must cease and Heritage Victoria notified as soon as possible.

3. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any Aboriginal cultural heritage is discovered or exposed at any time, all works must cease and the Secretary (as defined in the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*) must be contacted immediately to ascertain requirements under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.
4. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any munitions or other potentially explosive artefacts are discovered, Victoria Police is to be immediately alerted and the site is to be immediately cleared of all personnel.
5. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any suspected human remains are found the works or activities must cease. The remains must be left in place and protected from harm or damage. Victoria Police and the State Coroner's Office must be notified immediately. If there are reasonable grounds to believe that the remains are Aboriginal, the State Emergency Control Centre must be immediately notified on 1300 888 544, and, as required under s.17(3)(b) of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, all details about the location and nature of the human remains must be provided to the Secretary (as defined in the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*).

## Theme

### 3. Connecting Victorians by transport and communications

Construction dates	1885,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	MURTOA & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM, MURTOA RAILWAY WATER TOWER, FORMER MURTOA RAILWAY WATER TOWER, FORMER RAILWAY WATER TOWER,
Hermes Number	1294
Property Number	

## History

The Murtoa Water Tower was completed in 1886. It had a dual purpose: to provide the town with a reticulated water supply, and to provide water for steam trains. The adjacent Murtoa Railway Station had been built some ten years earlier. Negotiations between the Victorian Railway Department and Wimmera United Waterworks Trust resulted in a water tower project which benefitted both the railway and the town.

The Murtoa Railway Station (now non-operational) is located on the Serviceton railway line which is part of the Melbourne to Adelaide rail corridor. During the 1870s, it was one of a number of stations built for steam hauled rail services between Ballarat and the South Australian border: Beaufort (1874), Ararat (1875), Stawell (1876), Murtoa (1878), Horsham (1882), Dimboola (1882). The final station in Victoria, Serviceton (1887) (VHR H1592), provided a connection point to the South Australian Railway service to Adelaide.

During the late-nineteenth century, water towers facilitated the provision of a reticulated water supply for steam trains from a high point with sufficient water pressure for distribution across flat terrain. James Richings, a master builder from England, was engaged to oversee the construction of the Murtoa tower and another in Warracknabeal. The building contract was awarded to the Geelong firm Humble and Nicholson, which undertook a number of specialised engineering and manufacturing works in Victoria. Water towers built to a similar design during his era include those at Warracknabeal (also supervised by James Richings), Newport, Sale, Wangaratta, Donald (demolished) and Echuca (demolished).

The Murtoa Water Tower stored 182 kilolitres (40,000 gallons) of water. This was steam-pumped into the tank from a machine at nearby Lake Marma. Being at the highest point in the town, the water reached the railway station and properties in the town through pipes under the pressure of gravity. On 11 November 1886, the

*Dunmunkle Standard* reported that the steam pump at Lake Marma was turned on at 8am and seven hours later, by 3pm, the water tower was full.

The development of the Murtoa Railway Station reflected the growth of the town in the late nineteenth century as one of the most important centres in the Wimmera region. The railway line allowed wheat, wool and livestock to be transported to Ballarat, Geelong and Melbourne, as well as other areas. The extension of the Serviceton railway line saw an increase of passengers to Murtoa to such an extent that a new platform, railway footbridge (1896) and refreshment room on the main platform (1906) were built. In 1912 the Wimmera Inland Freezing Company was built with a view to the transporting of frozen meat in special railway trucks packed with ice blocks.

By the 1960s, steam locomotives had been phased out in favour of diesel engines, and the water tower fell into disuse, but remained structurally sound. In 1973, it was classified by the National Trust as a place of State-level cultural heritage significance. In 1975 the Murtoa and District Historical Society was formed after the town's centenary celebrations in 1972. Its collection started to grow and needed to be housed and displayed in the longer term. The Murtoa Water Tower Trust allowed the Society to repair and conserve the building so that it could function as a community museum. An internal staircase was built in 1978 (completed to the top floor in 1985) to replace a single access ladder which extended through the building.

Today, the water tower operates as the 'Water Tower Museum'. The ground floor is devoted to the James Hill taxidermy collection, consisting of 600 birds, mammals, reptiles and bird eggs. The upper three storeys are filled with objects from the Murtoa and District Historical Society collection, including photographs, local memorabilia and a number of honour rolls.

### **Selected bibliography**

Context, *Victorian Water Supply Heritage Study*, 2007.

Rabl, Jenny *The Romance of the Old Water Tower*, Murtoa and District Historical Society, Revised version, 2021.

### **Consultation and interviews**

The Executive Director thanks Peter Adler of the Murtoa & District Historical Society & Community Museum for facilitating access to the place and generously sharing the history of the water tower with the Heritage Victoria assessor.

## **Assessment Against Criteria**

### **Criterion**

The Murtoa Water Tower is of historical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

Criterion A: Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

Criterion D: Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places and objects.

## **Extent of Registration**

### **NOTICE OF REGISTRATION**

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 2017**, I give notice under section 53 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by modifying a place in the Heritage Register:

Number: H1193

Category: Registered Place

Name: Murtoa Water Tower

Location: Comyn Street and Hamilton Street, Murtoa

Municipality: Yarriambiack Shire

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 1193 encompassing that part of Lot 1 on Plan of Subdivision 510252 within 20 metres of the eastern boundary, and those parts of the adjacent roads (Lot 1 on Title Plan 381692 and

Lot 2 on Plan of Subdivision 510252) within 5 metres of the Tower lot boundary.

Dated 17 August 2023  
STEVEN AVERY  
Executive Director

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*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/>*