

FORMER MOYNE RIVER BRIDGE

Location

GIPPS STREET PORT FAIRY, MOYNE SHIRE

Municipality

MOYNE SHIRE

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7321-0080

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO13

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Interpretation of Site

Based on mapping, the 19th century bridges appear to be on a slightly different alignment and to the immediate south of the present bridge. No piles were observed on the bank or in the water at the time of inspection.

Archaeological Significance

The archaeological significance of the remains of the two timber bridges would be the information they can provide in the method and quality of construction including the materials used. The stumps of piles can be expected to be found within the river sediments and under the rock armour on the west bank. There may be some buried evidence of stone abutments on either side of the river.

Historical Significance

The 19th century bridges over the Moyne River reflects attempts in the 1850s to expand the township of Port Fairy onto the east bank of the Moyne River.

History

Public agitation for a bridge over the Moyne River at Port Fairy began in the mid-late 1840s, led primarily by Mr. William Rutledge (of Rutledge & Co. pioneer, substantial landowner & prominent merchant). The absence of a bridge crossing was of particular annoyance to Rutledge, who had stores on both the eastern and western banks of the Moyne - indeed he was the only person at that point to have property on the eastern shore. At several meetings among notable Port Fairy inhabitants in 1849, Rutledge attempted to gather support to petition the Governor for funds for a timber bridge, maintaining that it was a "most shameful neglect" on behalf of the government "in not having long ere this, built a bridge between the door of my store on the Belfast side of the river, and the door of my other store on the hummock side." In order to tempt others to support his cause, Rutledge offered that if the bridge were built, he would permit local residents to cross the bridge free of charge every Sunday "to take the air on the sea beach" - as long as, of course, said residents dealt exclusively at his stores; those who dealt with his competitors would be charged a toll. Although several residents felt such a bridge would depreciate the value of the western part of the township and any government funding that could be obtained would be better spent on other public works, by April 1849, Rutledge had managed to convince enough people and a formal petition was sent to the Governor.

Plans of Port Fairy dating to 1850 show several markings depicting proposed bridge locations. By 1852, funding was provided and tenders were called to erect a timber bridge according to plans and specifications prepared by the Bridge Office, Melbourne. Based on an 1856 sketch of Port Fairy, it appears that the bridge constructed was a simple timber beam bridge. Later plans show that the location selection was along a NE-SW orientation leading from the northern extent of Gipps Street. Four years later, in 1857, tenders were again called for the erection of a bridge over the Moyne River; finally awarded to A. Amos in 1862 who completed the work in 1863. While specifics are unclear, it is possible that the original bridge was somehow unsuitable or was already failing.

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By 1865, however, the timber bridge was apparently in a dilapidated and dangerous condition. Temporary barriers were erected by local residents to prevent dray traffic from crossing - a "precaution" which seems to have partially aimed to pressure the government to provide funds for a new bridge. The issue was debated in parliament throughout 1867 and a resolution was finally reached to build a new bridge, based largely on a special report by Mr. Steavenson, Engineer of Public Works Department.

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/>