
HO43 - The Diggers Rest Hotel



The Diggers Rest Hotel (prior to the fire in 2008)



Travelling to the Rushes' (Illustrated London News)



Martyrs of the Road, 1851

Location

1434-1466 Calder Highway DIGGERS REST, Melton Shire

Municipality

MELTON CITY

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO43

Heritage Listing

Melton City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

The Diggers Rest Hotel, at 1434-1466 Calder Highway, Diggers Rest, constructed in 1854, is significant as one of the few Mount Alexander Road goldrush wayside hotels known to survive, and the only known surviving example of the many wayside hotels that were established between towns during the goldrush. Architecturally, the original Victorian building has been compromised by additions, primarily during the interwar period. Historically, these same additions also demonstrated the revival of the Mount Alexander Road as a competitor to rail transport with the advent of the motor car, a far-reaching transformation which almost certainly saved the hotel from demolition.

The Diggers Rest Hotel, at 1434-1466 Calder Highway, is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC D.2). Although recently burnt and now in a ruinous state, it still demonstrates nineteenth century and interwar design qualities. The nineteenth century qualities include the composition of the massive two storey rough stone and brick walls the chamfered corner, , single window openings and main entrance doorway. The interwar qualities include the shallow-pitched gambrel roof form, broad eaves, and the timber framed window and door openings on the ground floor, and the two side additions.

The Diggers Rest Hotel, at 1434-1466 Calder Highway, is of historical significance at a LOCAL level (AHC A.4, B.2) as a rare wayside hotel associated with one of the most dazzling goldrushes in world history, and with Australia's largest goldrush. Wayside hotels are expressive of a major phenomenon of the goldrush event - unforgettable for its participants - of the trip to the diggings. The throng that pushed up Mount Alexander Road in the early 1850s was of historic proportions, and often exposed to major hardships and dangers. Wayside hotels were the most significant type of place on this road, in terms of their number (an average of about one every three kilometres on the dry Keilor Plains); their grandeur; and their associations with the colourful days of the early goldrush (including the sheer scale of the traffic, bushranging, bullockies, and Cobb & Co staging posts). At the time these hotels, including the two-storey masonry Diggers Rest Hotel, were the grandest and most dominant type of building in the rural parts of the colony. They were typically distinguished from town and goldfields hotels by their incorporation of a blacksmith for cart repair, and large stables.

The Diggers Rest Hotel is one of few surviving Mount Alexander Road goldrush wayside hotels, and an even rarer example of a purpose-built (early 1850s) goldrush wayside hotel. It is the only known surviving intermediary (situated between towns) goldrush wayside hotel on the road. It is also set apart by having been one of the few hotels identified in goldrush-era maps as a waymark of the journey to the Mount Alexander goldfields. Its undeveloped and relatively isolated setting, dominated by the double-storey hotel, preserve it as a striking representation of a goldrush intermediary wayside hotel. Although much of the rear of the hotel was substantially impacted by grading in recent years, it retains potential to provide archaeological evidence of the repair facilities (blacksmith and wheelwright shops), and also Cobb & Co stables. Its evocative name also contributes to the place as an expression of the goldrush. Its relative proximity to the headstone and grave of a journeying digger contributes to an understanding of the nature of the journey, and the role of hotels as mortuaries. Its interwar alterations and additions are historically significant as expressions of the revival of both the highway and the hotel as a result of the advent of motor traffic. This transformation almost certainly saved the hotel from demolition, which was the fate of most other wayside goldrush hotels in the early twentieth century.

The hotel is also historically important at the LOCAL level as the place after which the small township of Diggers Rest was almost certainly named.

The Diggers Rest Hotel, Calder Highway, is scientifically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC C2). The site has the potential to provide archaeological evidence that would contribute to the history of the goldrush era.

The Diggers Rest Hotel, Calder Highway, is socially significant (AHC G.1) at a LOCAL level as a place which is the recognised locally for its goldrush history, and valued as a place of recreation and community.

Overall, the Diggers Rest Hotel, Calder Highway, is of LOCAL heritage significance.

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| Heritage Study/Consultant | Melton - Shire of Melton Heritage Study phase 2, David Maloney, David Rowe, Pamela Jellie, Sera Jane Peters, 2007; |
| Construction dates | 1852, 1926, 2008, |
| Other Names | Lock's Oval Hotel (late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), 1434-1466 Calder Highway, Diggers Rest, |
| Hermes Number | 30023 |
| Property Number | |

Physical Description 1

Physical Description -

The Hotel was badly burnt out in October 2008, rendering this description obsolete. The description has been retained however for comparative reasons, as the assessment of the hotel's significance was made whilst it was still operating. (Inserted February 2009)

The Diggers Rest Hotel Calder Highway Diggers Rest is a local heritage landmark in a rural setting. Mature eucalyptus and oak trees flank the building.

The asymmetrical, two storey, rendered brick, altered Victorian and interwar hotel building is characterised by two storey wall planes. These walls represent the original (nineteenth century), as do the single window openings, main corner entrance doorway on the ground floor with bluestone threshold, rendered brick window sills and the rendered chimney bases. The shallow-pitched gambrel roof form clad in terra cotta tiles, multi-corbelled chimney tops, broad eaves, timber framed double hung windows with 6 paned upper sashes, timber framed window and door openings, arched ground floor windows, together with the flat roofed verandah supported by square painted brick piers, gabled porch at the corner entrance and the shallow gabled single storey east and west wings reflect the alterations and additions of the interwar period.

Internally, the building has high ceilings, and thick (approximately 750 mm) external walls. Some of the internal walls, including one of the main passage walls, are also of these dimensions. The spaces and rooms appear to have been minimally altered. Interior wall surfaces have been remodelled and repainted, although some early or original fabric may remain. Two of the large ground floor windows feature an arched or elliptical top. Chimneys may have been remodelled into similar forms.

At the rear of the hotel building is a garage. It is constructed of weatherboard and corrugated-iron, with a concrete floor and has two horse stalls at the back end. It may have been a coach house and stable erected sometime in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, and then resurfaced and used as a motor vehicle garage (further assessment is required to more fully ascertain its historical development). It may retain remnants of an earlier building or paving. It is of heritage significance and should be subject to archaeological investigation before any demolition is considered. While in need of repair and maintenance, it appears to be in quite reasonable structural condition.

Adjacent to the outbuilding is a small area paved with bluestone pavers. A post and rail fence was removed a few years ago; the base of one post is visible. A mature exotic tree was also removed in recent years; there are many suckers around the outbuilding. An old oak tree is situated some 10 metres behind the outbuilding.

The hotel is situated on 2 acres of land. Although it was extensively disturbed by grading works about four years ago, this area retains archaeological potential. Surplus surface material was pushed into two heaps with a front end loader. An examination of one of these shows roughly squared bluestone building or paving blocks, some with hard concrete attached. Some of these were moved off the site recently. There are also remnants of iron machinery / tools.

Behind the hotel, towards the centre of the property an electric pump is erected over what is thought to be a substantial underground tank, although surface evidence of this is not now visible.

At the western end of the rear of the building is a substantial platform roughly constructed of bluestone blocks and rubble, with a concrete cap. This is also said to be part of a former underground tank.

To the north of the hotel, and perhaps included in the original site, is a gate entranceway to what appears to have been a former house site.

Integrity

Integrity - Partially intact

Physical Conditions

Physical Condition - Ruinous

Historical Australian Themes

Melton Historical Themes: 'Transport'; 'Community'.

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/>