HOTSPUR BRIDGE

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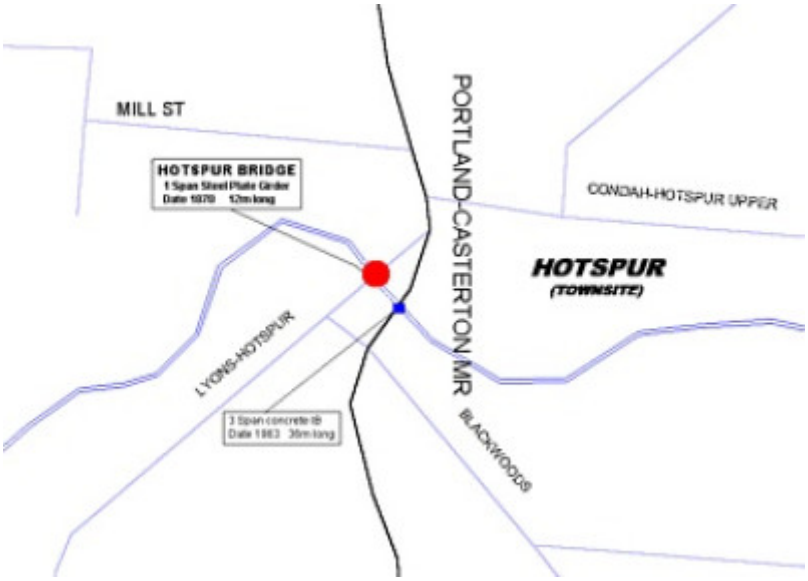

hotspur bridge plan

Location

OVER CRAWFORD RIVER, PORTLAND-CASTERTON ROAD HOTSPUR, GLENELG SHIRE

Municipality

GLENELG SHIRE

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1845

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO160

VHR Registration

November 18, 1999

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 3, 1999

What is significant?
The old Hotspur Bridge, built in 1870, is a disused bridge on the Crawford River crossing of the Portland-Casterton Road at Hotspur township. It is a low single-span wrought-iron plate-girder road bridge, with two half-through main iron girders supporting seven iron cross-girders. It has substantial bluestone-masonry abutments and wing walls, and formerly possessed a timber deck (apparently proposed for reconstruction). The span length is 15.2 metres, and the width of deck is 6.1 metres. The bridge has a slightly arched profile, and the half-through main girders on either side are topped by ornamental iron side-rails to give a neatly finished appearance. These rails, which bear the inscription ‘Waterloo’, appear to be a later addition, but evidently of nineteenth-century origin. Its timber deck does not survive, but the iron main frame and its stone-masonry abutments are intact. It is set in open grasslands in a broad flat road reservation some distance from the current highway and bridge, but accessible to vehicles by the old road approaches.

How is it Significant?
The Hotspur Bridge is of scientific (technical) and historical significance to Victoria.

Why is it Significant?
It is of scientific (technical) significance as one of the oldest surviving iron road bridges in Victoria, and the oldest surviving example of a wrought-iron plate-girder road bridge in Victoria. It is the only known surviving Victorian example of a half-through wrought-iron plate-girder road bridge. It is also unusual for colonial iron road bridges with timber decks to have supporting cross-girders of iron, bracing the whole structure. When constructed early in 1870, it represented a futuristic design for a ‘permanent bridge’ in a municipal world that still thought in terms of ‘economical’ all-timber road bridges. The only older surviving wrought-iron road bridges known to survive in Victoria are the Bridge Road Hawthorn (1861) and Redesdale (1868) wrought-iron lattice-truss bridges, and the Keilor wrought-iron box-girder bridge of 1868. Those bridges are of different structural categories, and are considerably larger. Among Victoria’s several extant later colonial plate-girder bridges, this remains a modest and unusual early rural example with relatively primitive but distinctive wrought-iron technology. It retains a high degree of structural integrity. The slight convex bow of the iron girders is also unusual; it is probably a technical design feature, and may also have been intended to create a visual effect. Its span length and deck width are notable among Victoria’s extant steel and wrought iron riveted plate girder bridges. It is a very rare surviving example of early iron fabrication in Portland.

It is of historical significance as an extremely rare example of an iron road bridge which pre-dates the devastating state-wide floods of the Spring of 1870. Had this bridge not been unusually strong it would probably have gone the way of so many other rural Victorian river bridges in the 1870 floods. It is an early monument to a once-important overland pastoral route which dates from the pioneering period, and which connected much of western and north-western Victoria with the coastal port of Portland in the pre-rail era. It was also an expensive design option for a rural bridge, indicating both the significance of the route, and the substantial subsidies provided by the colonial government.

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:

General Conditions:
1. All exempted plans and alterations are to be carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.

2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of alterations that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such alteration shall cease and the Executive Director shall be notified as soon as possible.

3. If there is a conservation policy or plan approved by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it.

4. Nothing in this declaration prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.

5. Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authority where applicable.

Specific Provisions/Exemptions

No permit is required for routine maintenance or minor repairs which replace like with like.

Construction dates	1870,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	5988

Property Number

History

Contextual History:History of Place:
Hotspur was described in 1880 as a postal township with 150 inhabitants, situated on the south bank of the Crawford River where it was crossed by the Portland to Casterton main road. The tiny township built around its single inn and its state school was thirty-two miles by road from Hamilton and 244 miles from Melbourne, with coach links to Portland and Ararat.

The road and crossing at Hotspur (then described only as “McDonald’s Inn”) appears on early consolidated maps of Victoria. The 1869-70 newspaper references to the ‘Hotspur new bridge’, imply that an earlier timber bridge had existed at this significant pastoral crossing place. It further appears that the Shire of Portland had in 1869 planned to replace this early structure by another all-timber bridge, at relatively low cost. Road bridges that used wrought-iron girders in place of timber stringers were almost unheard of in rural Victoria in 1869, when ‘the Hotspur new iron bridge’ was planned. Road bridges built of stone masonry, wrought-iron girders, and timber decks would become more fashionable at major stream crossings after Victoria’s devastating 1870 floods called all-timber bridge construction into question.

It is therefore interesting that the Victorian government’s inspecting engineer for the Warrnambool region, J. Crawley, suggested a relatively expensive ‘permanent bridge’ of stone, iron and timber for the Hotspur crossing just before the widespread flood damage of 1870 brought such ideas into vogue in rural Victoria. In September 1869 Crawley conducted a periodic inspection of main roads and associated bridges in Portland Shire, just one year prior to the major flood devastation. He concluded that a bridge ‘of a more permanent character than wood should be placed over the Crawford at Hotspur, and advised that stone piers and abutments with iron girders would be most suitable’. Rural councillors took heed of such advice from government engineers, because it implied that substantial state financial subsidies might be made available.

The extent of government interest in this remote crossing place is an indicator of its perceived importance to Victoria’s pastoral economy of the late 1860s. The north-south route through Hotspur served a vast area of western and north-western Victoria, in a pre-rail era when the pastoral economy depended heavily on shipping from Western District ports like Portland.

The importance of listening to government engineers became very evident early in December 1869, ‘the [shire] president having received a telegram from the Commissioner of Roads and Bridges, to the effect that a special grant had been made for that work’. Such a quick ‘special grant’ suggests Melbourne influence by a potent local Member of Parliament. Tender notices for the new Hotspur Bridge had already been advertised, so the shire council was able to consider them at a special meeting on 10 December. On 3 December, the shire engineer had reported ‘that he had been busily engaged in taking levels, preparing sections, drawings and specifications for various main road works, particularly Hotspur new bridge and approaches’. Duplicate plans had been forwarded to the Public Works Department in Melbourne, and the Hotspur Bridge project was listed on the council’s proposed road-works budget for 1870. Portland Shire’s rapid move was timely, because (due to state-wide bridge devastation that occurred in the winter and spring of 1870) state-government bridge budgets would henceforth be much more strained.

Six tenders were submitted for construction of the new iron bridge, of which four were in the range of £1400-£1500, while the highest figure was that of C. G. Millar for £1,892. The job went to a local contractor, George Jarrett of Percy Street in Portland, his tender of £1400 being the lowest. The Portland Guardian noted that some fourteen tons of ironwork would be required in the construction, and that this was the first large iron-work contract to be undertaken by a Portland contractor. Although small in iron-bridge terms, this early and functional example of a Victorian plate-girder road bridge was said to require some fourteen tons of iron, which at Hotspur in 1870 represented a formidable transport problem. The attractive iron hand-rails on top of each main iron girder appear to be a later addition, but are obviously of nineteenth-century origin. They bear the inscription ‘Waterloo’.

Actual construction was under way in March 1870, when ‘Geo Jarrett, contractor for the Hotspur Bridge, applied for an order to enter for stone to complete the abutments, etc., on the land of Mr Messer at Hotspur’. Council

permission was granted, ‘on the usual conditions, that the contractor make his own terms with the owner, and be responsible for all damage resulting’. Construction time was relatively short, it being announced by 2 June 1870 that ‘this bridge is now completely finished in every particular, and presents a very imposing appearance’. It was duly tested by J. G. Griffen, Shire Engineer. The shire roller laden to more than seven tons gross weight was passed over the deck, but ‘there was no deflection of any moment’. Despite the apparent speed of construction, contractor Jarrett was fined almost twenty pounds at the next Shire Council meeting ‘for non-completion of the Hotspur Bridge within the specified time...’. The Government’s Inspecting Engineer from Warrnambool, J. Crawley, visited the bridge site immediately before it was completed, and ‘the bridge as far as it was then finished was approved of’. Fortunately for the bridge contractor, he completed construction works before the record floods of the Spring of 1870 rendered such bridge works impossible.

Although the shire liked its new ‘permanent bridge’ it petitioned the Commissioner for Roads and Bridges, Steavenson, ‘for an increase on the government grant for the Hotspur iron bridge, which had cost much in excess of the original estimate for a wooden bridge’. Steavenson allegedly admitted the justice of the shire’s claim, and ‘would do the best he could’. Government’s Inspecting Engineer, J. Crawley, again visited the site to approve the bridge in October 1870: ‘the inspecting engineer subjected this structure to a considerable test by placing ironstone gravel on the centre of the bridge and has expressed himself satisfied with the result’. Contractor Jarrett, unperturbed by his fine for tardiness in construction, had applied to the shire for some thirty-one pounds in ‘extras’, and the Shire Engineer’s support meant the claim was allowed. George Jarrett was, after all, a Portland identity who was admired for his adventurous spirit in taking on the first iron-bridge contract in the area. A final Government Grant payment of £705 was duly signed on 12 December 1870, formally concluding the project. Shire councillors were doubtless relieved, because devastating flood damage across Victoria during the construction period meant that government funds were then very tightly stretched.

Despite the Portland Shire’s obvious pride in its handsome new bridge of stone, iron and timber, there does not appear to have been any grand official opening such as followed the completion of many other rural stone and iron bridges last century. Perhaps it was felt that the extravagance involved in construction of such a ‘lavish’ permanent bridge was enough of a challenge to ratepayers, without the additional insult of expenses associated with a grand official opening. Perhaps the repercussions of flood damages elsewhere in the shire during 1870 also discouraged too much display and celebration.

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

Hotspur Bridge is a low single-span wrought-iron plate-girder road bridge, with two half-through main iron girders supporting seven iron cross-girders. It has substantial bluestone-masonry abutments and wing walls, and formerly possessed a timber deck (apparently to be reconstructed). The span length is 15.2 metres, and the width of deck is 6.1 metres. The bridge has a slightly arched profile, and the half-through main girders on either side are topped by ornamental iron side-rails to give a neatly finished appearance. These attractive iron hand-rails appear to be a later addition, but are obviously of nineteenth-century origin. They bear the inscription ‘Waterloo’

The bridge is out of use and its timber deck is gone. Despite rust, the iron main frame and its stone-masonry abutments are intact, and a local heritage association has been formed to promote its restoration.

It is set in open grasslands in a broad flat road reservation some distance from the current highway and bridge, but accessible to vehicles by the old road approaches.

Assessment Against Criteria

Criterion ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA:

Criterion A.
The historical importance, association with or relationship to Victoria's history of the place or object.

It is an extremely rare example of an iron road bridge which pre-dates the devastating state-wide floods of the Spring of 1870. Had this bridge not been unusually strong it would probably have gone the way of so many other rural Victorian river bridges in the 1870 floods.

It is an early monument to a once-important overland pastoral route which dates from the pioneering period, and which connected much of western and north-western Victoria with the coastal port of Portland in the pre-rail era.

Its expensive design for a rural bridge is indicative of both the regional significance of the route, and of the subsidies provided by the colonial government to major works during the period.

Criterion B.
The importance of a place or object in demonstrating rarity or uniqueness.

It is one of the oldest surviving iron road bridges in Victoria.

It is the oldest surviving example of a wrought-iron plate-girder road bridge in Victoria.

It is the only known surviving Victorian example of a half-through wrought-iron plate-girder road bridge.

It is unusual for colonial iron road bridges with timber decks to have supporting cross-girders of iron, bracing the whole structure.

It is a very rare surviving example of early iron fabrication in the town of Portland.

The slight convex bow of the iron girders is unusual.

Criterion C.
The place or object's potential to educate, illustrate or provide further scientific investigation in relation to Victoria's cultural heritage.

The design purpose of the convex bow of the iron girders is not known with certainty, and the bridge provides the opportunity to provide information regarding the early bridge design in Victoria. It may have been an engineering feature, combining features of an arch and a girder; it may also have been provided to facilitate the passage of floodwaters without harm to the bridge; or to produce an optical impression of stability.

Criterion D.
The importance of a place or object in exhibiting the principal characteristics or the representative nature of a place or object as part of a class or type of places or objects.

When constructed early in 1870, it represented a futuristic design for a 'permanent bridge' in a municipal world that still thought in terms of 'economical' all-timber road bridges.

Among Victoria's several extant colonial plate-girder bridges, this is a modest and unusual early rural example with relatively primitive but distinctive wrought-iron technology, and a high degree of structural integrity.

Its span length and deck width are notable among Victoria's extant steel and wrought-iron riveted plate girder bridges.

Criterion E.
The importance of a place or object in exhibiting good design or aesthetic characteristics and/or in exhibiting a richness, diversity or unusual integration of features.

Its nineteenth century decorative iron hand-rails are rare.

The slight, but clearly evident arch of its elevation adds to its visual distinctiveness.

Its unique half-thro design may have related to the bridge being low to the water. A deck girder (below the timber deck) bridge would have impeded water flow to a larger extent.

Criterion F.
The importance of a place or object in demonstrating or being associated with scientific or technical innovations or achievements.

Criterion G.
The importance of a place or object in demonstrating social or cultural associations.

The bridge is valued by the local community, which is proposing preservation works.

Criterion H.
Any other matter which the Council considers relevant to the demonstration of cultural heritage significance.

Extent of Registration

NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the Heritage Act, I give notice under section 46 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including the Heritage Register Number 1845 in the category described as a Heritage place:

Hotspur Bridge, Over Crawford River, Portland-Casterton Road, Hotspur, Glenelg Shire Council.

EXTENT:

All the bridge marked B1, including its abutments and land five metres either side of the bridge and its abutments, as marked on Diagram Number 1845 , held by the Executive Director, being part of the land described as government road(Portland-Casterton Rd), Township of Hotspur Parish of Hotspur

Dated: 4 November 1999.

RAY TONKIN

Executive Director

[*Victoria Government Gazette* G 46 18 November 1999 p.2457