

No. 318: Beattys Bridge

Address	Beattys Road, crossing of Kororoit Creek, Aintree
Significance	Local
Construction Dates	1891, 1917, circa 1930s
Period	-
Date Inspected	6 February 2018



Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

The remains of the timber bridge known as Beattys Bridge which crosses Kororoit Creek and the stone cobbles located to the west of the bridge. The 3-span bridge has unhewn piles, stringers and corbels with large sawn cross beams and remnants of a circa 1930s longitudinal deck.

How is it Significant?

The remains of Beattys Bridge and the nearby stone cobbles are of local historical significance to the City of Melton.

Why is it Significant?

Historically, the Beattys Bridge ruins are significant as the remains of a timber vehicular bridge from the late 19th/early 20th century, of which only a few remain in the City of Melton. Beattys Road had been part of a major route from Melbourne to Ballarat. The crossing of the road over Kororoit Creek has associations with both the nearby water reserve and the Rockbank Inn which began as an early 1850s goldrush wayside inn and was later used by the Beatty family as a residence for about 90 years. The cobblestone road pavement is also associated with this important crossing. (Criterion A)

As one of only a few extant timber bridges in Melton, the remnants of Beattys Bridge have the potential to yield information that could contribute to an understanding of how the construction of timber vehicular bridges evolved from the 1890s, when part of the extant bridge was probably constructed, through to circa 1930s when the superstructure of the bridge was likely changed.

The cobbles located to the west of the bridge are one of only a few knapped or cobbled basalt roads that survive in the City of Melton. These roads, which were constructed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, have the potential to yield information about early road construction in Victoria. (Criterion C)

The remnant structure of Beattys Bridge is of representative significance as a timber bridge with a longitudinal deck that became a standard type constructed by the Country Roads Board and municipal councils post-1930. The use of round, unhewn log stringers and corbels was common for road bridges that were constructed both during and after the 1890s depression. (Criterion D)

Description

The remains of Beattys Bridge are located north of the current alignment of Beattys Road where it crosses Kororoit Creek. The bridge was inspected from both the road and the adjacent Beattys Road water reserve. It is situated close to the former Rockbank Inn, which is located to the south of the Beattys Road.

The 3 span timber road bridge extends about 21 metres across the creek and its deck is approximately 5 metres wide. The bridge is in poor condition and it appears that some sections have suffered fire damage. Many timber members are now missing including much of the deck and the full extent of the railings.

There are two timber piers supporting the bridge each consisting of four unhewn piles with sawn, transverse cross bracing. Between these piers, and the abutments to each bank, are unhewn stringers. These sit directly on the crossheads to both the abutments and the eastern pier. In contrast, the western pier also includes corbels suggesting that this section of the bridge has been added or altered at a later date. The cross bracing to the eastern pile is also different as unlike the others, the piles have not been notched to accommodate the bracing.

Large sawn cross beams are fixed on top of the stringers and remnants of the longitudinal timber deck and timber kerb remain. This arrangement combined with the use of round log stringers and corbels, is consistent with the bridges constructed by the Country Roads Board and municipal councils from 1930 to provide a smoother ride for motor vehicles.¹ All timber members are fixed with long metal bolts.

The abutments to west bank consist of timber piles and horizontal timber planks that retain volcanic rock. The bracing to these piles is now missing though their former location is evident. Concrete abutments are also located at either end of the bridge, higher on the bank than the early timber types, and likely relate to a later phase of alterations/repairs.

To the west of the bridge, remnants of stone cobbles are evident on the current alignment of Beattys Road where the gravel topping to the roadway has been worn/washed away. It is likely, that more of this stone is concealed nearby under the gravel finish.



View of bridge from bank with remnant sections of longitudinal deck evident



Cobbles to Beattys Road, immediately to the west of Beattys Bridge

¹ Don Chambers, *Wooden Wonders: Victoria's Timber Bridges*, 2006, Hyland House Publishing, Flemington, p28

History

Contextual History

In 1841, land in the Rockbank area was taken up by William Cross Yullie by Pre-emptive Right and became known as the Rockbank Estate. It is thought that the road now known as Beattys Road was established to provide access to the pastoral homestation of W C Yuille, who resided in what was to become the Rockbank Inn (sometimes referred to as the Rockbank Hotel) in the 1850s.² The Inn was later used by the Beatty family as a residence for about 90 years prior to being abandoned in circa 1960.³

By the early 1850s, the road passing the Rockbank Inn was known as the Ballarat Road. At this time, the route was considered to have an easier gradient than the ford on what is now the Melton Highway, though it did pass through swampy terrain.⁴ The Ballarat Road was used by diggers on their way to the goldfields from Melbourne with the Rockbank Inn, serving the passing trade.⁵ By 1856, it appears that a crossing had been established over Kororoit Creek close to the Rockbank Inn and in a similar location to the extant bridge. At this time, a large area (about 600 acres) to the north of what is now Beattys Road, either side of Kororoit Creek, was set aside as a Village Reserve.⁶

During the 19th century, most councils struggled to fund the construction and repair of roads. Whilst few councils appear to have constructed roads with stone foundations or appropriate drainage during this time, many cobbled and knapped roads are thought to have been constructed in the Melton area during the late-19th and early 20th centuries.⁷

Place History

In 1859, tenders were advertised for the construction of a bridge with approaches over Kororoit Creek on the Melbourne and Ballarat road, in the Bacchus Marsh District.⁸ The contract was awarded to Hanes Nicol and Co. for £2,654 13s in December of that year for erection of this bridge reported to be about 17 miles from Melbourne and possibly relates to an earlier crossing in the location of the extant bridge.⁹

Thirteen years later, in 1872, a description of a new crossing, noted as a culvert, for the subject road over Kororoit Creek was provided in the *Bacchus Marsh Express*.

Old travellers on this road will remember the rude crossing here some 20 years ago, and the present one is near the same place, about four chains above the old Rockbank Hotel, and an excellent piece of work of the kind it is. The crossing at the main creek, 24 feet from bank to bank, is composed of a boxed culvert 25 feet long, 6 feet by 2 feet in the clear, to carry off ordinary floods. The spaces on each side and on top are filled with very large boulders, and the interstices filled with spalls, forming a roadway 20 feet wide. In case of very heavy floods the water will flow over the top. There is also another crossing over a small creek further on built in the same manner. Over 2,000 feet of blue and red gum have been used in the construction of these culverts, and about four chains of cuttings, clearing, pitching and metalling has also been done, and I am quite surprised how the contractor could do the work for £58.

In July 1891, the ford at Rockbank over the Kororoit creek was reported to have been swept away by a flood and was to be closed for repairs with tenders to be advertised for its re-construction.¹⁰ In January 1893 however, plans were made to construct a bridge at the crossing, though the Braybrook Shire Council were considering at this time advertising for alternative tenders in 'wood and iron'.¹¹ In March of that year tenders were advertised for 'the erection of a truss bridge over the Kororoit Creek at Rockbank'.¹² Two months later, it was reported that the 'new bridge at Rockbank was in a forward state, all the superstructures

² Shire of Melton Heritage Study, Stage Two, 2006, Environmental History, David Moloney

³ Shire of Melton Heritage Study, Citation no. 317, Rockbank Inn

⁴ Shire of Melton Heritage Study, Citation no. 341, Old Rockbank Middle Road

⁵ *Argus*, 22 September 1853, p3

⁶ The crossing is shown as bridge. Geological Survey plan, Parts of parishes Kororoit, Maribyrnong, Derrimut and Jorrk, surveyed 1856, C G H Aplin, State Library Victoria

⁷ Shire of Melton Heritage Study, Environmental History, p121

⁸ *Age*, 12 November 1859, p2

⁹ *Argus*, 28 December 1859, p5, p7

¹⁰ *The Bacchus Marsh Express*, 18 July 1891, p2 and 10 October 1891, p7

¹¹ *Independent (Footscray)*, 14 January 1893, p3

¹² *Independent (Footscray)*, 18 March 1893, p2

being framed and ready for fitting in when the piles were ready'. At this time, plans and specifications were being prepared for the removal of the ford, the construction of approaches to the bridge and about 20 chains of two-railed fence.¹³

By July 1893, the bridge had been completed in what was reported to be 'a very satisfactory manner within contract time'. The bridge was constructed by F Weiland and Co. who requested a premium be paid on account of 'having finished well within time, and having allowed for its use during construction when the ford was washed away'.¹⁴ Three years after completion of the bridge, tenders were invited by the Braybrook Shire Council for 'painting and tarring truss bridge over the Kororoit Creek at Rockbank, possibly referring to a bridge at the subject site'.¹⁵

By 1917, Beatty's bridge was reportedly unsafe for traffic with the bottom girders in the truss reported to have been fractured.¹⁶ The estimated cost of repairs was reported to be at least £138 14s, though the engineer Mr D A Little, suggested that the cost may increase once 'the truss is pulled to pieces and more defective timber discovered'. Mr Little put forward an alternative proposal which included installing a centre row of piles with trusses, though it was noted that this would reduce the water way. Nonetheless, the engineer advised that tenders be called for the alternative proposal.¹⁷

In May 1917, the tender of J W Casey for repairs to Beatty's bridge for £153 was accepted.¹⁸ It is possible that much of the extant bridge, dates to this phase of works, though the abutments and one of the piers may be remnants of the earlier 1891 or 1893 bridge. By the 1910s, road bridges had begun to be erected in concrete with the Country Roads Board known to have constructed 46 bridges in concrete compared to 41 in timber for the period 1914-20.¹⁹

It would seem that the bridge was again upgraded post-1930 with the extant remnants of the deck consistent with standard timber bridges constructed by the Country Roads Board from 1930. The major development in traditional pile and stringer timber bridge design at this time was the introduction of a new type of motor bridge superstructure that featured longitudinal timber decking in place of the earlier standard transverse decking. This decking, like that at Beattys Bridge, was supported on spaced cross beams rather than being directly spiked into the stringers and provided a much smoother surface for motor traffic which benefited both vehicles and the bridge structure by reducing vibration.²⁰

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis

City of Melton Historical Themes:

Transport

Known comparable places in the City of Melton

Historically, this is one of only a small number of early timber bridges which remain in various states of disrepair in the municipality. Similar places include:

- Minns Road bridge over Tooler Creek, north of the extant road (Place no. 222): Timber, four span bridge with basalt abutments, likely constructed by 1916.
- Bridge abutments, Coimadai-Diggers Rest Road (former alignment) over Toolern Creek (Place no. 13): Concrete and timber, some basalt, west side collapsed.
- Ruinous Holden Road bridge (former alignment) over Kororoit Creek (Place no. 99): Timber and basalt, three span bridge with shaped corbels, 19th/early 20th century.

Other knapped or cobbled roads that are known to survive in the City of Melton include:

- HO109 - Old Rockbank Middle Road, (Place no. 109): Largely intact knapped road likely constructed during the early 20th century.

¹³ *The Bacchus Marsh Express*, 6 May 1893, p3

¹⁴ *Independent (Footscray)*, 8 July 1893, p3

¹⁵ *The Bacchus Marsh Express*, 18 January 1896, p2

¹⁶ *The Bacchus Marsh Express*, 7 April 1917, p4

¹⁷ *Gisborne Gazette*, 6 April 1917, p2

¹⁸ *Gisborne Gazette*, 4 May 1917, p2

¹⁹ Historic Metal Road Bridges in Victoria, Gary Vines and Ken McInnes, 2003, p52

²⁰ Don Chambers, 2006, p28

Condition

Bridge - poor (ruinous)
Cobbled road - fair

Integrity

Bridge - partly intact
Cobbled road - partly intact

Previous Assessment

The site was first identified as being of potential heritage significance in Stage One of the *Shire of Melton Heritage Study, 2002*. It was then identified as 'Beattys Bridge' and was noted to be disused and derelict' with a ford and stone fencing located nearby.²¹ In the final report for Stage Two, the site was included in Schedule 3A as a 'conservation desirable place'. It was one of 57 such places.

Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls

External Paint Controls	No
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	No
Outbuildings and/or Fences	No

Recommended Extent of Heritage Overlay

The proposed extent would include the bridge and the exposed section of cobbled road with nominal 5 metres of surrounding land.



Recommended extent of Heritage Overlay
(Source: Planning Maps Online 2014)

²¹ David Moloney, *Shire of Melton Heritage Study Stage One 2002: Places of Potential Heritage Significance*, p82-83