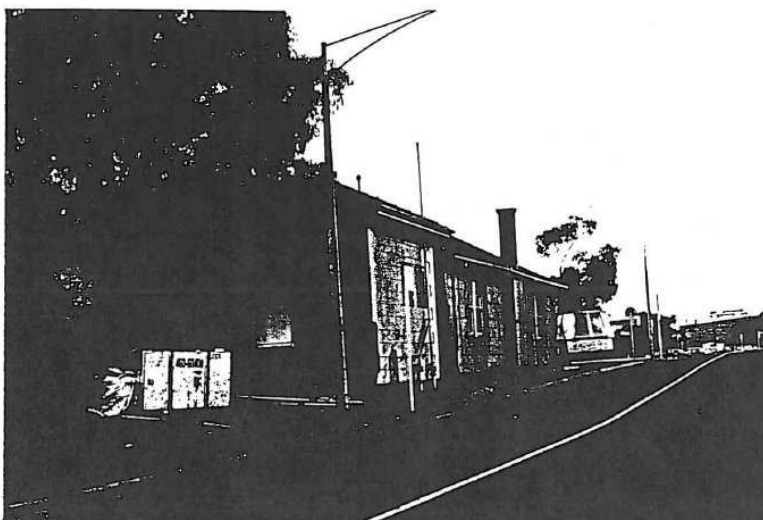


HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

Name Werribee Railway Station
Address Station Street Werribee **Significance Level** State
Place Type Railway Platform/ Station
Citation Date 1997



Werribee Railway Station

Recommended VHR Yes HI - PS Yes
Heritage Protection

History and Historical Context

The opening of the Geelong-Melbourne railway in 1857 provided a boost to the infant settlement of Wyndham Village (now Werribee township). The railway line ran through the village and a station was opened there.

The improvement in the district transport system provided a cheaper and more efficient way for local farmers to get their wool and farm produce to market, and encouraged the development of the small township. In 1851 the population of Wyndham Village was only 65 persons. They were scattered over a wide area and in 1854 there were "not more than ten or twelve houses in the village, one half of which consisted of the hotel and the adjacent tenements, the other half being located up and down the river at distances from the hotel varying from two to four miles. Growth was slow up to 1857, the population then numbering only seventy two persons." By 1861, after the opening of the railway, the population had risen to 130 persons residing in 26 houses.[1]

The opening of the Melbourne-Geelong railway was, in fact, a great event in the history of the whole colony. When the train reached Geelong on the first day, a grand banquet was held at which "eight tons of food (were) set out on three-quarters of a mile of tables".[1]

Early maps of the Township of Wyndham show the Geelong to Melbourne Railway running through the town. It divides the Mambourin section of the township north of the line from the Deutgam section to the south.[2]

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Recent research into Werribee Railway Station by Andrew Ward, an architect who has specialised in the assessment of railway buildings, confirms that the design of this station is notable as a surviving example of the work of Edward Snell, the engineer/architect for the Geelong and Melbourne Railway Company. Snell also designed the Geelong terminal complex, which was only partly built and is believed to have been demolished over a century ago. As engineer, Snell was responsible for the design of the bridges and earthworks on the new railway but these were reconstructed after the takeover of the company's assets by the colonial government in 1860.

According to Ward, until recently it was thought that all the early Geelong and Melbourne Railway Company buildings and structures had been demolished. The survival of the Werribee Station, therefore, says Ward, "may constitute the only known work of Edward Snell and it is certainly the only surviving remnant of Victoria's first company built rail line, preceding the oldest Government station building remaining at Williamstown by two years. Together with St Kilda Station of 1857, it is the oldest railway building in the State." [3]

The St Kilda Railway Station, recently seriously damaged by fire, is far from intact today. The Werribee Railway Station was also affected by fire. After it was burnt out in 1927, it was renovated in the style of the period with a cantilever verandah replacing the earlier standard VR late Victorian cast iron posted verandah. [3] A photograph from "The Sun News Pictorial" of 17 May 1927 shows the damage caused by this fire.

Ward describes the architectural style of the original Werribee building as in form and detail in a "Cottage Orne" style popular for the homes of the gentry. This may have been linked with the Chirnsides who " would have been sensitive to this aspect." After the fire, " the steeply pitched gable roof was replaced with a lower hipped roof but the masonry walls generally survive and are unique on Victoria's rail network for their use of sandstone quoining and window surrounds in conjunction with bluestone work of a quality generally inferior to later Government railway buildings."

Ward says that the "proportions of the windows and chamfered reveals" relate to the "Cottage Orne" style and " was only repeated in the VR network at Little River." However, Little River was designed and built by the Government after the 1860 takeover. He concludes that this choice of style may relate to the influence of the "squattocracy" in the district. [3]

Thomas Chirnside reputedly offered land free of charge for the railway line providing the station was built at "The Werribee." After its opening, Chirnside often ran special trains to bring his friends and supporters to coursing meetings, hunts, and other big occasions at Werribee Park. When he died, his coffin was taken by horse-drawn hearse to the Werribee Station . It was then carried by special train to Geelong for burial in the Eastern Cemetery. Mourners, staff and station hands travelled on the same train. [4]

Werribee Railway Station became a focal point for the development of a central business area in the vicinity this century. Station and Watton Streets became desirable locations for hotels, banks and a variety of business premises. Nearness to the station and good rail transport was a popular selling point for township allotments. Today the station buildings are only partially occupied. However, they have been judged as of considerable architectural and historical significance and have been nominated to the Victorian Heritage Register. They have been classified 'A' by the National Trust.

REFERENCES

- [1] Werribee. The First Hundred Years. ed. K. N. James, p.48.
- [2] Township of Wyndham, Office of Lands and Survey, Melb., 20 July 1863.
- [3] Andrew C. Ward & Associates, corres. with Heritage Unit, Ministry of Planning and Environment, 5 Sept. 1989.
- [4] The Coming of the Railway, in Werribee History Kit, pp.1-5.

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Previous Studies / Reference Nos.

National Trust Register - Classified

Victorian Heritage Register - Nominated and being examined

Relevant Historical Australian Themes

6.1 Transport

Description

Physical Description

The main Werribee Station building reflects two dramatic periods in its history. Details of its original form and construction are still evident in its form, materials and some architectural details. The impact of a fire in 1927 resulted in a reshaping of the building, with the walls reduced in height and a hipped roof replacing the previously gabled 'Cottage Orne' character (see history). Other features - such as the integrated signal box - demonstrate developments in railway procedures and safe working systems.

In recent years the building has suffered a severe decline in maintenance. Railway activities, such as ticket sales, have been moved out into portable structures. There is apparently some concern about the stability of the building's footings (although it is understood no detailed investigations have been undertaken). The stone work is also in need of specialist investigation to ensure it survives into the future.

Recommended Management

-

Occupancy

Ownership

Crown

Site Context

Area of Significance

Remaining parts of the early station buildings, plus 1927 adaptations and signal box.

Statement of Significance

Werribee Railway Station, opened in 1857, has State significance for its associations with the development of a country

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railway network in the colony. It is significant as the last extant building for the Geelong and Melbourne Railway Company designed by architect/engineer Edward Snell, and may be the only surviving example of his work. It has architectural significance for its original bluestone walls, sandstone quoins and Gothic style window openings which remain despite damage caused by the 1927 fire. Together with St Kilda Station (which may contain less original fabric) Werribee is the oldest railway building in the State. It has significance, also, as the oldest country railway building in Victoria. Its fabric and structure provide unique information concerning the design, construction technology and craftsmanship employed in Victoria's pre-government railways.

Werribee Station has great local significance as a focus this century for the development of a central business area in the vicinity; for its role in last century and this in promoting the development of the township and the interests of district farmers; and for its associations with the Chirnside family.

Recommendations 1997

External Paint Controls

-

Internal Alteration Controls

-

Tree Controls

-

Fences & Outbuildings

-

Prohibited Uses May Be Permitted

-

Incorporated Plan

-

Aboriginal Heritage Place

-

Other Recommendations

-Victorian Heritage Register Register of the National Estate Wyndham Heritage List Planning Scheme

This information is provided for guidance only and does not supersede official documents, particularly the planning scheme. Planning controls should be verified by checking the relevant municipal planning scheme.