Location:
114 COOPERS ROAD HARCOURT NORTH, MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE

Heritage Status / Level of Significance:
Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number: H2127
Listing Authority: VHR
Heritage Overlay Number: HO792

Statement of Significance:

What is significant

Blight's Quarry, opened in 1862 and located on the north-east lower slopes of Mt Alexander, consists of an eight metre high and 90 metres wide upper quarry face with sloping excavation and side walls extending for approximately 100 metres below. A layered succession of linear spoil heaps of granite blocks indicates the use of tramways to transport waste away from the quarrying area. Waste granite was also used to construct substantial mounting platforms for the Scotch derrick cranes which were used extensively within the quarry. A corrugated iron clad timber shed contains machinery mountings, and nearby are mounts for a compressed air tank. The ruins of a small building with fireplace below the earliest waste piles may indicate an early residence. Just below on the approach road is a small granite cottage and associated small two-storied building which probably date from the 1860s or 70s. A small early twentieth century timber bungalow is located nearby. The buildings are surrounded by remnant garden with orchard and ornamental planting. Fireplaces from small dwellings which may have accommodated quarrymen are located high on the southern corner of the site.

Large scale quarrying of granite in the Mt Alexander - Ravenswood area started in 1859 with stone supplied to the Melbourne to Echuca Railway. Cornish quarryman Joseph Blight arrived in the colony in 1855, and achieved some success in quartz reef mining at Eureka Reef in the Chewton/Campbells Creek area. He then turned to quarrying at Mount Alexander, at first providing stone for the railway. He began to work the Blight's Quarry site in 1862. The location on the lower slopes of the mountain made for easy transport of stone and waste. There was also a fortuitous alignment of bedding, joints and 'freeway' which allowed dimension stone to be extracted with ease. On the other hand, the presence of flaws including xenoliths ('black spot'), meant that there was considerable wastage of stone, reflected in the extensive waste heaps on the site. Blight and his wife moved to Castlemaine around 1890, leaving management to another Cornishman, John Jennings. Blight died in 1897 but the business continued under the name J. Blight and Co. The peak of output in the 1910s has been attributed to the increasing popularity of the stone for monumental work in cemeteries. In this period there were seven cranes operating and sixteen men in regular employment. Despite the high demand, no other large quarry was established on the mount until the Harcourt Granite quarry was opened in the 1920s. Tingay and Oliver's quarry followed in the early 1940s, along with a number of other smaller quarries. Use of stone in major buildings declined in the 1950s, but quarry was kept alive by the monumental trade. Blights quarry closed in 1964, with increasing competition from other quarries run by monumental masons who processed the stone on site.

At first Harcourt stone was used locally, but from the late 1880s it was used extensively on prestigious buildings in the centre of Melbourne. Buildings and monuments which used stone from Blight's Quarry include the Burke and Wills Memorial in the Melbourne General Cemetery (1864), the Princes Bridge (1888), Block Arcade (1892), Equitable Building Collins Street (1896, demolished, stones now
displayed in front of the Exhibition Building), Burns Memorial (1903, originally St. Kilda Road, now Treasury Gardens), Flinders Street Station (1910), Former National Bank of Australasia Head Office Collins Street (1927). From the 1880s, stone from Blight's Quarry was exported to New Zealand and Europe. The quarry received a gold medal in the Franco-British Exhibition in London in 1908.

How is it significant

Blight's Quarry is of historical significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant

Blight's Quarry is of historical significance for its capacity to represent the quarrying of Harcourt granite, a high quality stone which was used in the local area from the late 1850s and was used extensively on major buildings and monuments in Melbourne from the 1880s. The stone was also used extensively for monumental work in cemeteries around Australia and was exported in quantity to Europe and New Zealand.

Blight's Quarry is of historical significance for its association with the gold rush in Victoria and as an example of how gold rush immigrants turned to their former trades as the gold ran out.

Blight's Quarry is of historical significance as the only large quarry working on Mount Alexander from 1862 up until the 1920s and as the quarry which best represents nineteenth century quarrying of this stone.

Blight's Quarry is of historical significance for its potential to reveal information about technology and work practices of granite quarrying from the 1860s up to the mid-twentieth century. The site also has the potential to be used to educate on the technology and work practices of granite quarrying over that period. The site has features which dramatically illustrate the processes of production of dimension stone, including extraction from the quarry face, cutting to size and movement of stone and which demonstrate the manual nature of the work in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

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This place/object may also be State heritage listed. Check the Victorian Heritage Database. For further details, contact the local Council or go to Planning Schemes Online