

Heatherlie Quarry



Mt Difficult, Grampians, Victoria

Information about the Mt Difficult Freestone Quarry

Introduction



During the late 19th Century and into the beginning of the 20th Century, the Mt Difficult Freestone Quarry (or better known as the Heatherlie Quarry) provided substantial quantities of freestone of the highest quality. Its principle use was for building construction and monumental work.

The stone has been used in several important historic buildings in Melbourne, including Parliament House, the Town Hall and the State Library.

Of such significance was the freestone, that a tramway was constructed to link the quarry to the main railway line at Stawell, Victoria. A new township of Heatherlie was gazette close to the quarry.

Walking around the site of the quarry today, remnants of the quarry's equipment, accommodation houses and rock faces still showing the marks of the operations of the quarry.

Location



This quarry is off the Hall's Gap-Mount Zero road (also known as the Bolte Highway), 13.5 km north of Halls Gap. It is at the base of Mount Difficult Range, on the eastern side.

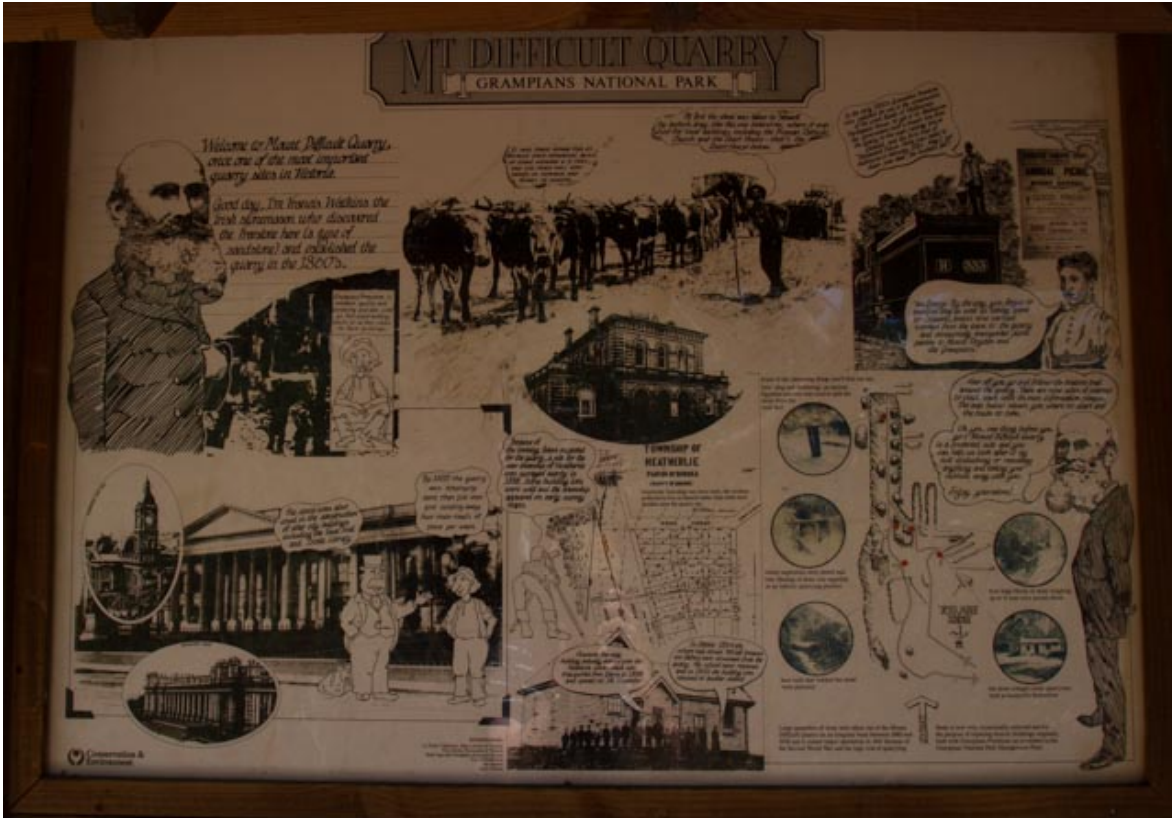
A carpark is located on the left hand side quite an easy walk to the quarry up a slight rise – about 2.5 km round trip.

Geological Description



It is one of the strongest and most durable freestones in the world. A fine, even grained white sandstone, probably Lower Carboniferous, it is characterized by siliceous segregations and by absence of cementing and colouring matter. Because of its hardness in situ and the presence of flints, the stone is difficult to quarry cheaply, but its unrivalled durability, very low maintenance requirement and appearance make the effort well worthwhile. It can be used as a veneer only 5-6cm thick. Its failure in a building is almost unknown.

History



1861-1862 Francis Watkins, a stonemason of Stawell, discovered an outcrop of freestone in the Mt Difficult range while on a shooting trip, and recognised that the stone was extremely durable

1866 Watkins submitted an ornamental carved freestone pillar to an 'exhibition' in Melbourne. It was latter returned to him.

1870's Grampians freestone from 'Watkins Quarry' used in construction in Stawell. It was initially used for rebuilding after a fire in the Main Street of Stawell, but mainly for headstones and similar items. Watkins obtained a lease over 3 acres for a quarry at the Mt Difficult site. The methods that Watkins and his workmen used did not meet what was expected in quarrying.

1872 Watkins submitted samples of the freestone from Heatherlie quarry for consideration for use in the Governor's proposed new residence

1876 Watkins again submitted samples, for the new Law Courts. He enlisted the support of the local member of Parliament, Mr John Woods MP. The samples were rejected because they were too expensive.

1877 Mr P Galbraith, a Mining Agent of Stawell, sought a rough estimate (from local member of Parliament, Mr John Woods) of the cost of a tramway from Stawell to the Mt Difficult Quarry. Inspector Sutton, Public Works Department, visited the quarry to test the quality of the stone for possible use in an extension to Parliament House

1878 Stawell Quarry Co. borrowed a crane from Public Works Department for use at the quarry.

Victorian Railways Assistant Engineer, Mt F Rennick, Public Works Department Inspector Mr Sutton, Francis Watkins and 'Mr Smith' of Stawell investigated two suggested routes for the tramway.

Mr P Galbraith, who wished to form the Grampians Tramway and Freestone Quarry Co. to develop the quarry, again sought details of the cost of constructing a tramway.

Consequently, a preliminary survey was authorised. A survey camp was established in the vicinity of the quarry, with Mr C A Lawson in charge. About this time, Watkins gave up his quarry lease "to the company" in which he held a 10% interest.

A lease of over 3 acres was granted by the Lands Department to 3 people for 21 years. The lessees agreed to supply stone for any Government buildings at a fixed rate.

The Leggatt Committee suggested a gullet be put into the quarry to show whether or not it was worth opening up. This was not done because of insufficient funds.

1879 Lawson was instructed to survey a line from the quarry tramway line to Halls Gap. Victorian Railways refused to build the tramway to the quarry and to supply Mr Galbraith with so he could do the job himself.

The Commissioner for Public Works appointed a Board to examine a report upon suitable stone for the erection of the Houses of Parliament. The Board examined a sample of "Stawell Freestone" and visited several quarries including Mt Difficult. It recommended, unanimously, that "Stawell stone" be used and that a tramway be constructed from Stawell to Mt Difficult.

Tenders invited for west front of Parliament House but all were too high.

1880 The Royal Commission on the Parliament Buildings adopted the Boards recommendations.

Victorian Railways again declined to construct the tramway, but in October, it was agreed the Public Works Department would meet all construction costs.

1881 Contract for the construction of the extensions to Parliament House signed by Mr Samuel Amess, the government having undertaken to build the tramway from Stawell to the Quarry.

Contract for construction of the tramway signed by Messrs Pallett & Tamlin in February

1882 Amess arranged with the lessees of the quarry for them to supply the stone for the extensions to Parliament House.

On 23rd February the first four rail trucks carrying stone from the quarry reached Stawell en route to Melbourne.

Considerable controversy broke out about the quality of the stone sent to Melbourne. It was found to be inferior to the samples originally supplied, exhibiting “peculiar” defects of an unexpected kind. The Public Works Department ordered work at Parliament House to cease.

An expert committee, a board of enquiry and a Parliamentary Select Committee investigated the quality of the stone, all visiting the site in the process.

The Select Committee confirmed the original selection:

“the Mt Difficult freestone was superior to any other....known to Melbourne, local or imported”. It recommended that the Government make an advance to the quarry company to enable development of the quarry by “putting in a gullet” of about 60 metres into the mountain, or to the extent necessary, to obtain the best quality stone.

1884 Contract was let Comben, (?) and Otter of Yarraville to “put a gullet into the freestone at the Grampians, Stawell”.

Samuel Amess declined to continue work on Parliament House, forfeiting his contract.

1885 John Pigdon’s tender for the west face façade, using Mt Difficult freestone was accepted

1886-1887 Peak period of production at the quarry. Over 100 men were employed. They lived in crude huts nearby, which may have been partially built of stone fragments. Derrick Cranes were supplied and erected; several leases were being worked.

1888 Township of Heatherlie was surveyed; land sale from November but few blocks taken up. About 33 children of school age living in Heatherlie. Many of the workers who had first lived in tents were building houses.

Site for a State School gazetted.

School building removed from Darra to Heatherlie (August)

1889 School closed in October – attendance dropped to only 4 children.

1890 As a result of a strike, a tender for the supply of building stone from the quarry was not let.

1891 Five Children (and their families) were living at the quarry 1892 Seven families at the quarry

Only two “decent” houses had been built, others were of bark

1893 The quarry was probably closed earlier in the year mainly due to the cessation of the Public Works Department Contract.

1900-1910 Standard Quarries Pty Ltd took over the existing mining leases

1938 Lack of orders forced the quarry to close.

1939 Quarry untouched by the disastrous bushfire

1940 Some of the machinery was removed to marble quarry in South Australia

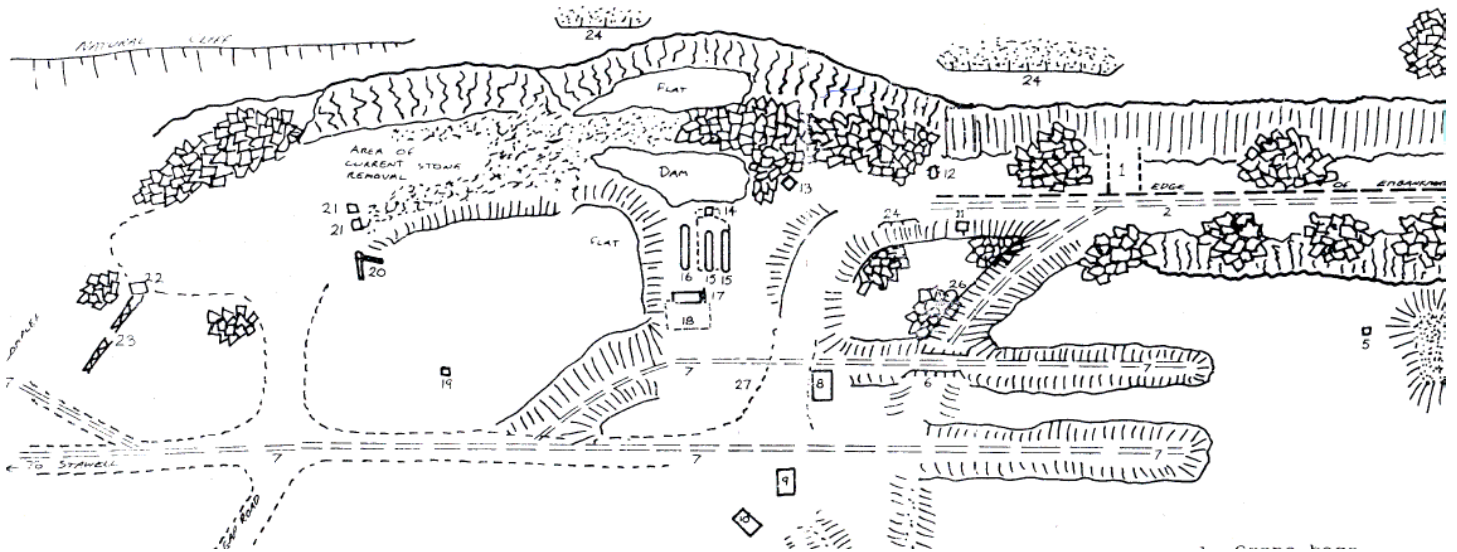
1949 Tramway line officially closed to all traffic

1951 Legislation passed to authorise dismantling of the tramway line. Almost the whole of the track removed. Many of the sleepers and a few rails are still in place in the quarry.

1971 Some stone extracted to face a building in Adelaide

c 1981 Stone from the quarry used to face a wall in the City Square, Melbourne, and in extensions in an ANZ Bank in Melbourne

The Quarry Today



Legend - Use the links to see photos of these.

1. Crane Base
2. Tramway - some rails are visible
3. Survey Line clearing
4. Yellow Peg
5. Yellow Peg
6. Rail siding for loading stone
7. Railway Alignment
8. Stone Hut - 2 rooms 8m x 4.5m
9. Stone Hut - 1 room 7m x 4.5m
10. Stone Hut - 1 Room 6m x 4m
11. Explosives Magazine - built in the embankment
12. Steel Hopper
13. Winch
14. Stone Chimney

15. Furnace and Steam Chamber
16. Compression Chamber
17. Steam Compression Engine - 4 Cylinders
18. Foundations
19. White Peg
20. Crane
21. Steel Hopper
22. Winch
23. Boom
24. Dry Stone Walling
25. Peg
26. Trolley
27. Foundations

Photos



Crane Foundation

A number of Crane Bases exist - this one is about the easiest to photograph and is in reasonable condition



Tramway

The Tramway running along a large section of the Heatherlie Quarry. Used to move the stone to the Railway Line



Rail Siding

The Tramway meets the Railway line and it is here that Stone was transferred into carriages to be transported to Stawell and to Melbourne



Rail Alignment

The Railway Line that ran from Heatherlie Quarry to Stawell ran along this section. No rails or sleepers exist, but the alignment can still be clearly seen

Cottages

There are three Cottages - the largest Cottage consists of two rooms, the remaining cottages only have one room only. The stone used is obviously the Heatherlie Stone.





Explosives Magazine

As with all mining, explosives were used. The drill marks can still be seen on the edge of the quarry face where explosives would have been placed to enable the stone to be removed. Explosives needed a safe place to be stored.



Chimney

The Steam Plant consisted of many items - this is the remains of the Chimney. this is having to be supported to ensure it is structually sound











Buildings Using Heatherlie Stone

Some of the buildings in which the stone from Heatherlie Quarry has been used.

MELBOURNE

Extensions to West wing of Parliament House

General Post Office, Elizabeth Street

Port Authority Building - notably the columns on north and west faces of the building

Former Bank of New South Wales, Collins Street - between Elizabeth Street and Queen Street - freestone veneer

Supreme Court Annex (former Crown Law Offices), Lonsdale Street, facing of front and side elevations

Melbourne Town Hall

States Savings Bank (Head Office), Elizabeth Street, Exterior

Taxation Offices

Newspaper House

Regent Theatre - recent renovation of West Wall

Memorial to John Wood MP - Exhibition Building, Carlton

STAWELL

Court House (completed 1872)

Town Hall

Shire Hall (pillars in front of building)

Anglican Church

St Patricks Roman Catholic Church

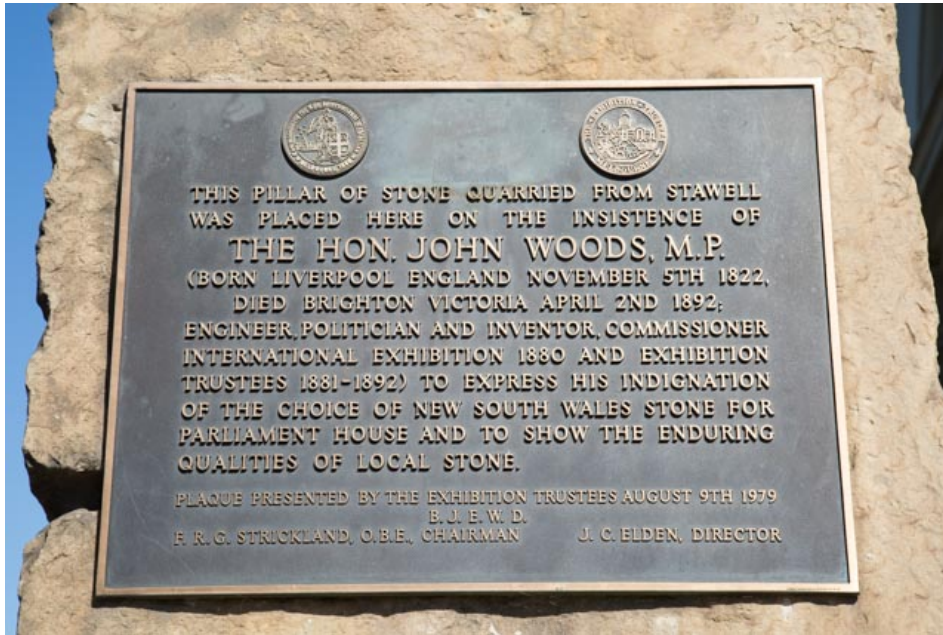
Memorial for John Wood MP

Recently, whilst in Melbourne I visited the Exhibition Centre in the Carlton Gardens. On the South Eastern corner of the building is a pillar of stone being Heatherlie Quarry Stone.



The Hon. John Woods was a great supporter of the Local Stone from Heatherlie Quarry near Stawell. As described on the plaque, John Wood insisted that this pillar be placed to express his indignation at NSW Stone being used for Parliament House. Below is a photo of the plaque.

The pillar is in very good condition, however the foundation was not of high quality resulting in a substantial lean as show in this photo.



This pillar of stone quarried from Stawell was placed here on the insistence of the Hon. John Woods MP. (Born Liverpool England November 5th 1822. Died Brighton Victoria April 2nd 1892. Engineer, politician and inventor, Commissioner International Exhibition 1880 and Exhibition Trustees 1881-1892) to express his indignation of the choice of New South Wales stone for Parliament House and to show the enduring qualities of the local stone.