CREMONA

BRIDGE
CREMONA BRIDGE

1913 - 1930

CONTRIBUTORS

Alexandra & Yea Standard
National Library Australia
State Library Victoria
University of Melbourne

Sandra Cumming
Joshua Hibbert
Lawrence Hood
Kathie Maynes
Kelly Petersen
John Sharwood
David & Debbie Hibbert

FACTSHEET #048
Located ten minutes from Alexandra, the Cremona Bridge spans the Goulburn River at Cathkin, once providing access to the then Cathkin Estate (also called Cremona Estate). The Estate was a large parcel of land located around Cathkin and Cremona that was divided into allotments for purchase. Unfortunately, many of the allotments suffered from isolation from the main Cathkin area and railway link. To remedy this, a bridge was proposed to give access into the Cremona allotments and given to tender in 1912.

The tender called for a five span steel re-enforced concrete bridge with three support girders and bluestone rock abutments, for an agreed cost of just over £1860 pounds. The contract to build the bridge was awarded to John Monash by the end of 1913.

During construction, plans changed due to cost overruns, and as a result, the abutments...
were built of lesser lighter rock instead of the bluestone that the tender originally called for. This change to the construction method was approved by the then Shire Engineer Cecil Short, who at the time took public pride in his involvement in the bridge.

By 1913, the bridge had been constructed and passed all testing. However the Cremona Estate was never successful and the bridge turned out to be a costly white elephant.

This was mostly due to one land owner managing to take possession of the several of the allotments by late 1919. Constant flooding of the river before, during and after the Sugarloaf Dam project at Eildon was completed, weakened the bridge's two abutments. Costly repairs to the bridge were never undertaken, due to a lack of financial incentive for the Alexandra Shire, when any money spent would only benefit a small number or people.
During the November 1934 major flood event - the first of the bridge ends collapsed. It is unknown when the second end collapsed, however it is believed that the both ends had collapsed by 1940.

Structurally, the Cremona bridge now stands as a permanent testimony to the failure of design and maintenance by the Alexandra Shire. The greatest responsibility is with Shire Engineer Cecil Short for approving the design changes to the abutments which ended up leading to its short life. While the bridge was based on a sound engineering technique, the damage that constant flooding could cause to abutments was not sufficiently accounted for.
The failure of the Closer Settlement should have been foreseen and could have avoided such a large and expensive project from ever going ahead. The construction of the bridge generated a huge financial burden on ratepayers and for some older residents, it is still seen as evidence of a misuse of shire funds.

Technically, the inner spans of the bridge were 11.4 metres from centre to centre. The outside spans were around 11 metres to the base of the abutment. The bridge was the third longest of its kind in Victoria and the spans were the longest used any of the numerous bridges built by John Monash (later Sir John Monash).

On 15 August 2014, a Geocache by geocacher Texmax2 was hidden at the site, creating a natural increase in visits by those unaware of the historic site and the importance to our District's heritage.
TIMELINE

1899 A soldier settlement scheme was established for Cathkin, with expressions of interest called for.

16 March 1899 Sale of Cathkin Estate, sub-divided into lots, was submitted to public auction. *(Yea Chronicle, Thursday 16 March 1899).*

1912 A tender was put out for the contraction of a steel reinforced bridge at Cremona.

1913 The design of the abutments was changed with permission from the Shire Engineer Cecil Short.

1913 The Cremona Bridge was completed and opened.

7 December 1917 In the council minutes for that month, Cr Edwards said Mr McNabb had spoken to him about the Cremona Bridge. If something were not done, the bridge would be cut off from the approaches. *(Friday 7 December 1917).*

1919 By 1919, the Estate was a white elephant, with only one landowner taking possession of the seven allotments.

1934 During the great flood of November 1934, one abutment was completely compromised and that section of the bridge collapsed into the river.

2010 Artworkz published their first 'Historic Times' heritage newspaper, which included a piece on the Cremona Bridge.

2010 Artworkz make the Cremona Bridge a part of their Tourism Platform, due to its appeal to heritage based tourism.

2012 Artworkz commenced work on this factsheet.

August 2014 A Geocacher (Texmax2) hid the first geocache ever hidden at or
near this historic site. It was hidden to attract visitors to this remarkable historic site.

26 October 2016 With permission, the Alexandra & Yea Standard published an article based on our factsheet and using photographs from our publication, highlighting this amazing bridge.
WEDNESDAY 15TH MARCH.

GOULBURN VALLEY

GREAT SU

SIONAL SALE.

THE WELL-KNOWN CATHKIN ESTATE,

5,500 Acre

ALSO, 45 ALLOTMEN

Magnificent River Flats. The Finest Dairying
Grand Agricultural Land.
Splendidly Watered by the Goulburn River and numerous
Railway Station in the Centre and at Each End of the Estate.

WM. HAMILTON & CO.

Have received instructions to Sell by Public Auction, on the ground, at the Homestead,
a quarter of a mile from Cathkin Railway Station, on Wednesday, 15th March, at
TWELVE O'CLOCK on arrival of the morning train, the Celebrated

CATHKIN ESTATE,
CONTAINING ABOUT 5,500 ACRES,

Subdivided into Blocks from 11 to 380 acres.

THIS PROPERTY is well known as being one of the best in the Goulburn Valley. The whole of it is first
class Sheep and Cattle Country, while the River Flats are famed as containing some of the finest land on the
Goulburn for Agricultural, Dairying, or Foraging purposes. It is splendidly Watered by the Goulburn River,
to which it has a frontage of about four miles, also by numerous Creeks and Springs. There are also over 1,000
acres of Valuable Standing Pasture on the property.

Few estates are better served as regards Railway communication. Cathkin Railway Station being, in the centre
of it, while Molongpho and York Railway Stations are at each end; no portion of the property being more than
two and a half miles from a Railway Station.

The Land has been carefully subdivided into Blocks to suit all classes of buyers, and opportunities will be given
to a purchaser at the Sale to secure one or more Blocks at option.

No restrictive covenants have been placed upon the Land, so the Auctioin's instructions are as follows:

TERMS OF PAYMENT: One-fifth Cash, Balance extending over seven years in equal payments, bearing interest at the rate of 4 per cent., or ALL CASH at the option of the purchaser.

TERMS FOR THE TOWNSHIP ALLOTMENTS — One quarter Cash, Balance in 1, 2, and 3 years, Interest 4 per cent.

TITLES - FREEHOLD CERTIFICATES.

POSSESSION CAN BE HAD AT ONCE OF ANY OF THE LAND PURCHASED.

LUNCHEON PROVIDED.

WALKER, MAY & CO., 87 Queen Street, Melbourne; or from
Mr. A. DUNN, CATHKIN, who will show intending purchasers over the property.

EXCEPTIONAL TERMS OF PAYMENT.

LOCALITY PLAN.
Construction of the Cremona Bridge.
Copyright expired. Image courtesy University of Melbourne.
Construction of the Cremona Bridge.
Copyright expired. Image courtesy University of Melbourne.
Construction of the Cremona Bridge.
The abutments can be seen
Copyright expired. Image courtesy University of Melbourne.
Construction of the Cremona Bridge.
Copyright expired. Image courtesy University of Melbourne.
Construction of the Cremona Bridge

Photographer Lin Cumming  Courtesy Sandra Cumming and Courtesy State Library Victoria
Construction of the Cremona Bridge

Photographer Lin Cumming  Courtesy Sandra Cumming and Courtesy State Library Victoria
The broken Cremona Bridge stands as a testimony to times past.
The broken Cremona Bridge stands as a testimony to times past.
Built by Sir John Monash in 1913, Cremona Bridge only survived 21 years.

Cremona bridge in 2011, being crossed by two fishermen from Melbourne, who frequent this area.
Cr Edwards said Mr McNabb had spoken to him about the Cremona Bridge. If something were not done, the bridge would be cut off from the approaches.

Alexandra & Yea Standard
Friday 7 December 1917
Courtesy National Library Australia
Cremona Bridge – a bold history

It is amazing what local historical treasures can be uncovered if a little delving is done. John Sharwood from Cathkin has provided some interesting information from a report by Lesley Alves of the Heritage Council, who investigated the history of Cremona Bridge, located off Riddls Road.

Officially opened in 1934, Cremona Bridge, although now in ruins, was a remarkable feat of innovative technology and engineering of its time.

The bridge was designed by engineer and the university’s namesake, John Monash, and built by the Reinforced Concrete and Monier Pipe Construction Company, who won the tender at a proposed cost of £1,868.

Despite the area’s thriving timber industry, the decision was made for the bridge to be constructed from reinforced concrete, which at the time would have seemed an extravagance considering its intended use.

In 1931, the Closer Settlement Board purchased and subdivided a parcel of land into seven lots with the view of attracting potential market garden farmers. Unfortunately, one of the flaws in its conception was that Cremona Estate lacked a river crossing. Being isolated from the Cathkin township and more importantly, having no link to the railway to transport produce, didn’t seem to attract potential farmers.

The Closer Settlement Board provided funding for the bridge to be built; construction began in March 1934 and was tested in October of the same year.

Interestingly, although the Alexandra Shire provided no financial backing for the bridge, the shire engineer at the time, who was responsible for supervising the work, was happy to take credit for much of it.

Cremona Bridge, which was the result of such new technology at the time, also had a few faults. The estate concept never caught on and the seven allotments eventually reverted back to one holding. The bridge gradually wore the ravages of time and river, and partially collapsed during the 1934 floods.

An example of a large reinforced concrete girdar bridge, Cremona Bridge is the third longest of the few remaining in Victoria, exceeded in overall length by the Benalla and Janesville bridges, and its spans are amongst the longest found in Monash girdar bridges. Each of the pier’s columns have withstood many floods, being founded on four reinforced concrete piles, but much of the original bridge has fallen to ruin.

Alexandra & Yea Standard
Wednesday 26th July 2006
Courtesy Geoff Hayes & Joyce Fields
Artworkz

Serving the community