

The Sovereign Hill boilers

The Sovereign Hill boiler house features two Cornish boilers originally used at mining sites and entirely typical of such mining boilers. The design originated with Richard Trevithick in 1812 and was so successful that this type of boiler was still being made in Ballarat in 1935, and was still being installed second-hand at Victorian mining sites in the 1940s.

The boiler on the left was built by Thompsons of Castlemaine in 1909, and first used at the Central Ajax mine in Daylesford. This mine started work in 1910 but, by 1917, was in decline, and was forced to close in 1921.¹ After being out of use for some years the boiler was sold to the Daylesford Woolen mills.² At some as yet unknown date it went to the Daylesford Hospital, and arrived at Sovereign Hill in 1982.

The boiler on the right was built by Roberts & Sons of Bendigo circa 1909, and is believed to have been first used at one of the mines on the Deborah line of reef at Bendigo. In 1934 it arrived at Erskine House at Lorne.³ The boiler appears to have been acquired to service major extensions to Erskine House which followed the completion of the Great Ocean Road. It arrived at Sovereign Hill in 1972, and was the first boiler in use here to power the steam exhibits in 1975.

Outside the boiler house above and to the west is the 'cold well', the storage for bulk supplies of cold water for the Sovereign Hill boilers. This was a former Thompsons of Castlemaine Cornish boiler built in 1907 and registered to the Returned Soldiers & Sailors Woolen & Worsted Mill in Geelong in 1927.⁴ Next to it is the smaller 'hot well', which is the immediate supply of chemically-treated hot water for the boiler house feedwater pumps. This was formerly a small multitubular underfired boiler of unknown origin.

To the north of the boiler house are three more pressure vessels. The air receiver for the Ingersoll-Rand compressor is a former steam and water drum from a Babcock & Wilcox WIF boiler, modified for its present purposes by Miller & Company of Ballarat, Bendigo and Melbourne. It was built (as a boiler) circa 1910 and received registration as an air receiver in 1941 when in the ownership of Nell Gwynne Reefs NL of Bendigo.⁵ Further north are two boilers currently not in use. One is a Jackass of unknown make designed for use without a brick setting. Its registration page is blank. However, its registration number fits within a series largely confined to Victorian country sawmills, so it was probably first used in a sawmill.⁶ Next to it is a Cornish boiler built in 1916 by Cowley of Ballarat and registered new to the Victoria Coffee Palace in Melbourne in February 1916.⁷

References

¹ Maddicks, Henry T. (1950). *100 Years of Daylesford Gold Mining History; The Argus*, Wednesday 14 December 1921, page 13.

² PRO, VPRS 7854/P2 unit 56 BIA 5590.

³ PRO, VPRS 7854/P1 unit 9 BIA 8780.

⁴ PRO, VPRS 7854/P2, unit 71, BIA 7077.

⁵ PRO, VPRS 9534/P1, unit 2, folio 62, air receiver D5930.

⁶ PRO, VPRS 7854/P2, unit 50, BIA 4967.

⁷ PRO, VPRS 7854/P2, unit 39, BIA 3838.