

## FORMER OVENS DISTRICT HOSPITAL



OLD HOSPITAL RUINS  
SOHE 2008



1 old hospital ruins church  
street beechworth



h00358 old hospital ruins  
church st beechworth view  
across facade she project  
2003



h00358 old hospital ruins  
church st beechworth view  
facade she project 2003



Stone footings



Facade



Facade



Garden



Garden



Facade rear



Scout hall

## DIAGRAM 358

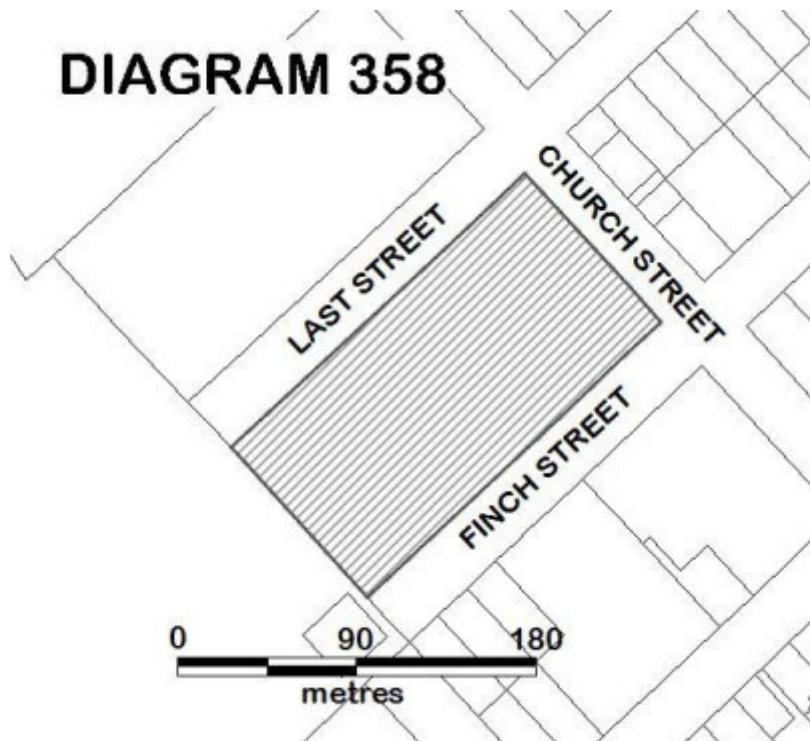


diagram 358.JPG

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### Location

13 CHURCH STREET BEECHWORTH, INDIGO SHIRE

### Municipality

INDIGO SHIRE

### Level of significance

Registered

### Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0358

### Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO29

### VHR Registration

October 9, 1974

### Amendment to Registration

June 11, 2015

# Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 4, 2015

### What is significant?

The Former Ovens District Hospital (formerly known as the Old Hospital Ruins), consisting of: the front facade of the former hospital, the remainder of which was demolished in 1940; archaeological features, artefacts and deposits that relate to the development and use of the hospital; the landscaping and the mature trees planted in the former hospital gardens.

### History Summary

The Former Ovens District Hospital was built on this site in stages from 1856, and operated until 1940. The first building, designed by J H Dobbyn and built in 1856-57, had two wards accommodating 20 patients. It was then the only hospital between Melbourne and Goulburn in New South Wales, and received patients from all of north-east Victoria. The hospital cared mainly for those who could not afford to consult doctors. A new two-storey wing which doubled the size of the hospital was added in 1858, and another wing was added in 1861. In 1862-63 the earlier buildings were united behind a grand new classical facade. Another new ward was built in 1871, a Chinese ward was added in 1883 and an isolation ward, designed by D Fiddes, was built in 1890. In 1874 the gardens were laid out by R H Jenkyns and planted with over 200 species of trees, including fruit trees, and shrubs, as well as vegetable and flower gardens. During the early twentieth century, with the construction of new hospitals in nearby towns, the importance of the Ovens District hospital declined, and it closed in 1940. The buildings were demolished in the same year, with only the front facade and the gardens retained. A scout hall was built in the grounds in 1962. In 1964 restoration work was undertaken on the hospital facade. The former hospital gardens are now known as Centennial Park.

### Description Summary

The most prominent remaining feature of the Former Ovens District Hospital is the impressive front facade along Church Street. This is a long symmetrical Free Classical style composition of cut local granite, designed in the Palladian manner. It has arched windows and pediments at the centre and at each end. The central entrance is most elaborate, with three arched openings with rusticated voussoirs, pairs of attached columns and a Baroque-inspired pediment above. The end sections have Palladian-influenced triple windows. The site contains archaeological remains of the former hospital buildings, which were demolished in 1940, and other archaeological evidence for the use of the hospital in the period 1857-1940. The site has many mature trees originally planted in the hospital gardens: sixteen specimens of *Cedrus deodara*, three *Araucaria bidwillii*, two *Pinus nigra* var. *corsicana*, an *Arbutus unedo*, *Catalpa bignoides*, an unusual *Fraxinus americana*, an outstanding specimen of *Sequoia sempervirens*, a rare *Pinus sylvestris*, a rare *Juniperus virginiana*, a fine *Aesculus hippocastanum*, rare *Ulmus x hollandica* 'Purpurascens', two very old *Pinus radiata*, and numerous *Populus alba* trees and suckers.

### How is it significant?

The Former Ovens District Hospital is of archaeological, architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criteria for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

#### Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

#### Criterion B

Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

## Criterion C

Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.

## Criterion D

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places/objects.

### *Why is it significant?*

The Former Ovens District Hospital is significant at the State level for the following reasons:

The Former Ovens District Hospital is historically significant as a demonstration of the need for medical facilities in goldfields towns in the mid-nineteenth century, when hospitals were only for the poor and those without relatives to care for them. The grand style and scale of the facade symbolises the optimism and vision of the gold rush period. The former gardens demonstrate the scale and nature of hospital gardens in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Such gardens included ornamental gardens, which were considered conducive to healing, as well as orchards and kitchen gardens for food production. The plantings include conifers, in particular several large Himalayan Cedars (*Cedrus deodora*), an outstanding Coast Redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*), rare Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), Pencil Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), several Bunya Bunya Pines (*Araucaria bidwillii*), and a very tall Purple-leaved Dutch Elm (*Ulmus x hollandica 'Purpurascens'*), and American Ash (*Fraxinus americana*). [Criterion A]

The Former Ovens District Hospital is of architectural significance for the Classical style front facade, erected in 1862-63, which is one of the earliest remaining, and most impressive, hospital structures in Victoria. The fine classical style facade demonstrates the importance attached to such buildings at the time. [Criteria B, D]

The Former Ovens District Hospital is archaeologically significant for its potential to contain features, artefacts and deposits that relate to the development and use of the hospital. The remains of stone building foundations are visible at ground level across the site, and scatters of historical artefacts (glass, ceramic and metal) can also be seen. It is likely that the site contains archaeological remains of structures including wards, apartments, and other hospital buildings that have the potential to provide information about the design, construction and use of the place. It is also likely to contain occupation deposits and layers of lost or discarded items that may provide information about the experiences and living conditions of staff and patients at the hospital. The site is a rare example of a large, mid-late nineteenth century hospital site that is likely to have a high degree of archaeological (principally sub-surface) intactness [Criterion C].

The Former Ovens District Hospital is also significant for the following reasons, but not at the State level:

The Former Ovens District Hospital demonstrates the importance of the town of Beechworth in the nineteenth century, when it was the administrative centre for north-east Victoria. The facade is one of the most distinctive and impressive classical facades in Beechworth.

## **Permit Exemptions**

### **General Exemptions:**

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

**Places of worship:** In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must notify the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

**Subdivision/consolidation:** Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act*

1987 and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

### **Specific Exemptions:**

#### **General Condition 1**

All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.

#### **General Condition 2**

Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible.

#### **General Condition 3**

All works should be informed by Conservation Management Plans prepared for the place. The Executive Director is not bound by any Conservation Management Plan, and permits still must be obtained for works suggested in any Conservation Management Plan.

#### **General Condition 4**

Nothing in this determination prevents the Heritage Council from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.

#### **General Condition 5**

Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the relevant responsible authority, where applicable.

### **SPECIFIC PERMIT EXEMPTIONS**

#### **Hospital facade:**

- . Minor repairs and maintenance which replace like with like.
- . Installation or repair of damp-proofing by either injection method or grouted pocket method in a manner which does not affect the cultural heritage significance of the place.

#### **Scout hall:**

- . All internal works.
- . Full or part demolition.
- . External alterations which do not increase its footprint

#### **Landscape:**

The following landscape maintenance works are permit exempt:

. The process of gardening and maintenance, mowing, hedge clipping, bedding displays, removal of dead plants, disease and weed control, emergency and safety works to care for existing plants and planting themes. This excludes and below-ground or excavation works.

. Removal of vegetation that is not significant to maintain fire safety and to conserve significant buildings and structures.

. The replanting of plant species to conserve the landscape character and plant collections and themes.

. Repairs, conservation and maintenance of hard landscape elements (including roads and paths), and drainage and irrigation systems.

. Management of trees in accordance with Australian Standard; Pruning of amenity trees AS4373.

. Removal of plants listed as noxious weeds in the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994.

**Fire suppression duties:**

The following fire suppression duties are permit exempt:

. Fire suppression and fire fighting duties provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground features or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits.

. Fire suppression activities such as fuel reduction burns, and fire control line construction, provided all significant historical and archaeological features are appropriately recognised and protected.

Note: Fire management authorities should be aware of the location, extent and significance of historical and archaeological places when developing fire suppression and fire fighting strategies. The importance of places listed in the Heritage Register must be considered when strategies for fire suppression and management are being developed.

**Signage and site interpretation:**

The following Signage and Site Interpretation activities are permit exempt:

. signage and site interpretation activities provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground structures or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits.

. the erection of non-illuminated signage for the purpose of ensuring public safety or to assist in the interpretation of the heritage significance of the place or object and which will not adversely affect significant fabric including landscape or archaeological features of the place or obstruct significant views of and from heritage values or items.

. signage and site interpretation products must be located and be of a suitable size so as not to obscure or damage significant fabric of the place.

. signage and site interpretation products must be able to be later removed without causing damage to the significant fabric of the place.

Note: The development of signage and site interpretation products must be consistent in the use of format, text, logos, themes and other display materials.

Note: Where possible, the signage and interpretation material should be consistent with other schemes developed on similar or associated sites. It may be necessary to consult with land managers and other stakeholders concerning existing schemes and strategies for signage and site interpretation.

## **Theme**

6. Building towns cities and the garden state 8. Building community life

Construction dates	1862,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place, Registered archaeological place,
Other Names	CENTENNIAL PARK, OLD HOSPITAL RUINS, OLD OVENS GOLDFIELDS HOSPITAL,
Hermes Number	100
Property Number	

## History

### Contextual history

Beechworth owes its existence to the discovery of gold in 1852. The Beechworth area was first settled by squatters from 1837, but the discovery of gold resulted in a rush of miners to the area - about 8,000 arriving by November that year. The Ovens was an important river system in north-east Victoria and gave its name to the goldfields in this area. The town developed around the Gold Commissioner's Camp, established in 1852 on the granite hill on the north bank of Spring Creek. The township was first known as Mayday Hills, but when surveyed in 1853, it was named Beechworth. The main overland route between Melbourne and Sydney passed through the town until the 1870s (when the railway was built further to the west), and until then Beechworth was one of the richest towns in Victoria and the financial and administrative centre of the north-east.

Until the mid-1850s most buildings in the town were of wood, bark or canvas, but following the election of a town council in 1856 building regulations were introduced. Many of the town's major buildings were erected during the following five years, including the Ovens District Hospital (1856, VHR H358) and the Burke Museum (VHR H345, begun in 1857 by the Young Men's Association as a hall and library). The first town hall was built in 1859. By the early 1860s a group of important administrative buildings, known as the Beechworth Justice Precinct (VHR H1464), had been completed along the south side of Ford Street, and a large gaol (VHR H1549) was begun to the north of this in 1858. The Beechworth Lunatic Asylum, later the Mayday Hills Hospital (VHR H1864-67) was built in 1864-67, and the landmark post office (VHR H867) was completed in 1870.

The Ovens gold rushes peaked in 1857, and during the following two decades the population of Beechworth decreased (though the last mining company in the district only closed in 1956). Despite the decline in the gold industry, the town was sustained well into the twentieth century by the presence of the government institutions founded in the 1850s and 1860s: the asylum and the gaol.

Tourism has now become a major industry in Beechworth. Tourism began in the 1880s with the town's reputation as a health resort and picturesque beauty spot. The declining prosperity of the town had the advantage that the post-World War II development, that led to the destruction of so much of Victoria's nineteenth century fabric between the 1950s and 1970s, was avoided. At this time there was an increasing awareness of the importance of Victoria's early history and heritage. In the 1960s the National Trust was active in classifying Beechworth's early buildings, and efforts began to restore buildings which had fallen into disrepair. The retention of much of the town's historic character has now made it a popular tourist destination.

### History of place

Injuries and illness were common on the goldfields, and most people could not afford the attentions of a doctor and had no relatives to care for them. Local businessman James Ingram is credited with initiating moves to build a hospital in Beechworth only a year after the town was settled in 1852. Prompted by a letter Ingram wrote in 1853 to the newly-established local newspaper, the *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, a public meeting was called in Beechworth in December that year and the first hospital committee was formed. Ingram was appointed to raise funds, and met with a generous response across the Ovens goldfields. The committee chose a hospital site sloping down to the gorge south of Church Street. The foundation stone was laid on 1 September 1856 by the Resident [Gold] Warden, Mr Price, using a trowel crafted locally with a tin ore handle and a blade of pure gold.

This occasion was celebrated with a procession of about 4000 citizens headed by the town's German brass band, and an elaborate banquet was held on the Hospital Reserve.

The Ovens District Hospital was built in stages, as needs increased. When built it was the only hospital between Melbourne and Goulburn in New South Wales, and patients came from a wide area. The first hospital building was constructed to a design by J H Dobbyn, cost £2347 and was completed in February 1857. It contained two wards 35 ft x 17 ft [10.7 x 5.2m], each holding 20 patients, as well as apartments for the resident surgeon and matron and an area that served as a dispensary, operating theatre and board room. The hospital was intended primarily for the poor, who were required to pay only what they could afford. The management committee, made up of prominent local citizens, framed the rules for hospital management, and insisted on high standards of cleanliness and the strict supervision of staff. The rapidly increasing number of patients led to the erection in 1858 of a new wing costing £1000. This two-storey wing with five medium-sized wards doubled the size of the hospital and was built entirely by subscription. In 1861 another wing was added, accommodating a further 20 patients and costing £1158.

In 1862-63 the appearance of the hospital was radically altered with the construction of an impressive new facade across the front of the earlier buildings, which remains today. Up to 1862, in its first 5 years of operation, the Committee of Management had spent £32,000 on buildings and maintenance, and had admitted for treatment 3,600 patients. Although the Ovens District Hospital was intended as a philanthropic institution, and was supported by generous donations from the community, especially from the Chinese, in practice it relied heavily on government grants.

Even after hospitals were built in Albury in 1861 and in Wangaratta in 1871, many patients preferred the Ovens District Hospital. It continued to grow over the years: the Albert Ward was added in 1871 and the Chinese Ward opened in 1883, both behind the main building. A Gothic style isolation ward designed by D Fiddes and costing £2000, was built in 1890 to the west of the main building, the contractors being A & J Kyle. This ward was named 'Little Canada' by a Canadian miner who likened the pine-clad slopes of the adjacent gorge to his native country. On the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone for the isolation ward, by Sir William Clarke, another procession was held complete with band, lodges and the Chinese miners displaying their famous dragon.

By this time the hospital had sweeping gardens with cedars and Bunya pines which patients could view from the shelter of a rotunda. The hospital gardens were laid out and planted in 1874 by R H Jenkyns, who planted over 200 species of trees and shrubs. Jenkyns also laid out the Town Hall Gardens in 1875.

The hospital had a resident surgeon until 1898, assisted by two honorary doctors. In that year the management committee decided to change to the employment of three non-resident doctors. There was always a matron and female nurses to assist with female patients, but the other nursing duties were carried out by men until 1896, when the bold step was taken by the management committee to employ six female nurses to work in all wards, under the supervision of a matron.

During the early twentieth century new hospitals were built in north-east Victoria, and the number of patients attending the Ovens District Hospital decreased. In 1940 a smaller more modern hospital was built in Sydney Road, Beechworth and the Ovens District Hospital ceased to function. The buildings were demolished in 1940 with only the facade retained. A scout hall was built in the grounds in 1962. The facade stonework was restored by the Beechworth Lions Club in 1964. What were the grounds of the former hospital are now known as Centennial Park.

#### KEY REFERENCES USED TO PREPARE ASSESSMENT

Roy C Harvey, *Background to Beechworth From 1852*, Beechworth 1978 [1964].

John O'Connor & John Hawker, 'Beechworth Tree Study', prepared for Shire of Beechworth June 1986.

Carole Woods, *Beechworth. A Titan's Field*, North Melbourne 1985.

#### Plaque Citation

Built in stages between 1856 and 1890, this was the first hospital in north-east Victoria. The facade was added in 1862-63 and the extensive gardens laid out from 1874. The hospital closed in 1940 with only the facade and

gardens retained.

## Extent of Registration

### NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 1995**, I give notice under section 46 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by modifying Heritage Register Number H358 in the categories described as Heritage Place and Archaeological Place.

Former Ovens District Hospital  
13 Church Street  
Beechworth  
Indigo Shire

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 358 encompassing all of Crown Allotments 17, 18 and 19, Section 28, Township and Parish of Beechworth.

Dated 11 June 2015

TIM SMITH  
Executive Director

[*Victoria Government Gazette* G23 11 June 2015 p.1306]

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*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*