

# ST KILIANS CATHOLIC CHURCH



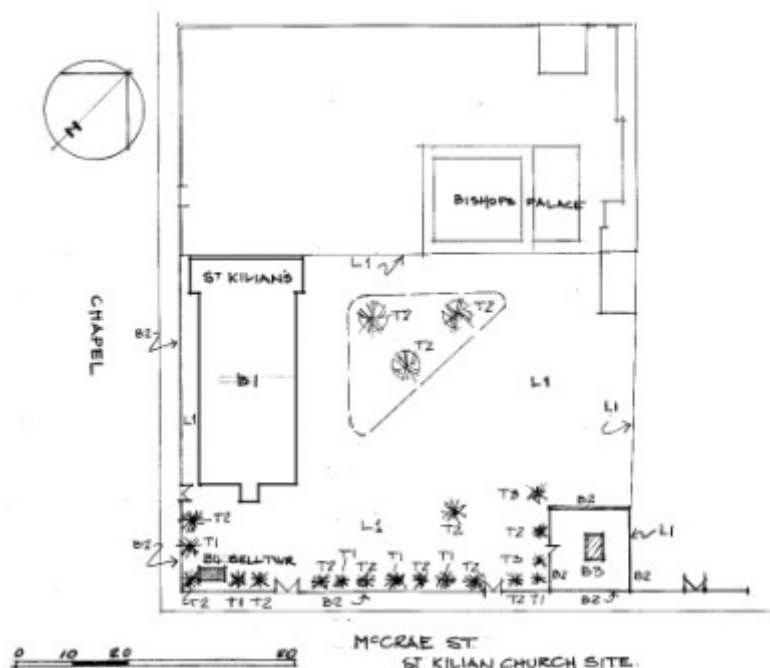
ST KILIANS CATHOLIC CHURCH SOHE 2008



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1 st kilians church bendigo side view dec1998



st kilians church bendigo plan

## Location

173 MCCRAE STREET BENDIGO, GREATER BENDIGO CITY

## Municipality

GREATER BENDIGO CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## **Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number**

H1341

## **Heritage Overlay Numbers**

HO179

## **VHR Registration**

September 4, 1997

## **Heritage Listing**

Victorian Heritage Register

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## **Statement of Significance**

Last updated on - May 13, 1999

Within months of gold being discovered in Bendigo in 1851, the Rev Father Dr Henry Backhaus (1811-1882) arrived on the diggings and celebrated the first mass. For over a year he conducted services in a tent, before a bark and slab chapel was built for him by the diggers. The first St Kilian's church was constructed in 1857. A sandstone structure of Gothic design, it served the congregation until it was replaced by the present St Kilian's church in 1888 thus perpetuating continuing use by the Catholic Church. Designed by the notable local architect W. C. Vahland (1828-1915) the Gothic timber structure of kauri, oregon and hardwood was originally intended to serve as a temporary pro-cathedral until such time that a cathedral could be built. The 1860 German organ and the bell and bell tower of 1869 from the former church were accommodated at the new premises. After the opening of the Sacred Heart Cathedral in 1901, St Kilian's became a parish church.

St Kilian's Church is of architectural, aesthetic and historic importance to the State of Victoria.

St Kilian's Church is architecturally and aesthetically important as an intact and unusually large timber church. Featuring a long nave with clerestory and side aisles, the church is significant for its fine hammerbeam ceiling, impressive series of timber arches, crafted joinery, uniformly designed ecclesiastical furnishings including 56 curve end pews, the Backhaus stump chair, Baptismal font, small nave table, high Altar and reredos, High Altar side table, main altar candlestick, the timber sedilia, two side altars and two side altar tables. These together with the superbly carved German organ and its bench seat, make this all timber interior unique among churches in Victoria. Other notable features include the historically important bell and bell tower, the iron and granite fence and palms plants, which are aesthetically important for their formal streetscape qualities. The stepped row of Washingtonia palms alternating with shorter Canary Island palms which border the Chapel and McCrae Street frontages and the Backhaus' gravesite is unusual and of note.

St Kilian's Church is historically important for its association with Rev Dr Henry Backhaus, pioneer clergyman of the Roman Catholic Church on the Bendigo goldfields from 1852 to his death 1882. He is buried in the grounds. The church is also historically important for its association with architect, W.C. Vahland, and is the only known timber church of his design.

## 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:

#### EXEMPTIONS FROM PERMITS:

(Classes of works or activities which may be undertaken without a permit under Part 4 of the Heritage Act 1995)

The process of maintenance to care for existing plantings and trees is permit exempt. These works should establish and maintain a (minimum) 1m radius exposed earth bed around the base of each palm.

The process of maintenance of the asphalt surface of the car park is permit exempt.

Installation of floor coverings in the sacristy is permit exempt. In the nave and aisles the installation of heritage style carpet is permit exempt except over tiled and marbled areas.

Refurbishment of toilets including removal of existing sanitary fixtures and associated piping, mirrors, and installation of new fixtures is permit exempt.

Installation of hydronic, or concealed radiant (Ceiling Foil Radiant Heating or under carpet heating) type heating, is permit exempt provided that the installation does not damage existing skirtings, architraves and the location heating unit (boiler etc) is concealed from view.

Re-wiring is permit exempt provided that all new wiring is fully concealed and any original light switches, pull cords or GPO's are retained in-situ.

Installation of hooks, nails and other devices for hanging of paintings, mirrors, and other wall-mounted works of art are permit exempt.

Installation of bulk insulation in the space between the ceiling lining and roof sheeting is permit exempt.

Installation of smoke detectors is permit exempt.

Removal of extraneous wiring and aerials is permit exempt

Construction dates	1857,
Architect/Designer	Vahland, William Charles,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place, Registered object integral to a registered place,
Hermes Number	1274
Property Number	

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## History

Contextual History:History of Place:

Gold was found in Bendigo in October 1851. In early April 1852, a few weeks after Wesleyan James Jeffrey had preached the first sermon on the diggings, the Rev. Father Henry Backhaus arrived and celebrated the first mass.

Backhaus had recently arrived in the colony from South Australia and soon afterwards was appointed the first Catholic Priest on the Victorian goldfields, by the Very Rev. Bonaventure Geoghegan, Vicar General of Melbourne. Appointed permanently to Bendigo Creek in November 1852, Dr Backhaus established his Mass centre at a place which came to be known as Consecrated Flat, not far from the district called Irishtown and a little west of the present site of St Kilian's Church. The son of a boot merchant, Backhaus had been an excellent student. Sent to Rome from his native born Paderborn in Prussia, he had taken a doctorate in divinity before he was twenty-five. William Howitt described him as 'a man of great liberality and learning.' He was also an outstanding pianist, a skilled practitioner of homoeopathic medicine, a clever businessman and an ecumenist. He soon won the respect of diggers of all creeds and walks of life. Like the diggers he too lived in a tent in the early days, his only chair being hewn out of a stump. At first he conducted services in the open-air, but by May 1852 he had set up Bendigo's first Catholic chapel in a tent. It served for over a year, with the altar being roughly fashioned from a large cedar chest. As there was little room for the congregation many stood outside. In order to let the miners on the surrounding hills know when Mass was being celebrated he erected a pole on which a white flag with a cross emblazoned on it was lowered when the service had commenced. The flag was raised again to signify the Consecration and lowered at the end of Mass.

By the summer of 1853 the heat had become unbearable for those standing outside the tent. The diggers rallied, and large number brought picks, axes and shovels and set to work erecting a bark slab chapel forty feet long and sixteen feet wide. Although it was a great improvement on the tent, its canvas roof leaked. On a wet day in 1855 Bishop Goold celebrated Mass in the chapel with someone holding an umbrella over him.

A Gothic Sandstone Church

A Crown land site nearby had been granted in 1854 for a new church and school. On 25 April 1856 the contract was signed for a new stone church with work commencing on 3 May. However it was soon discovered that the materials used were inferior, and work had to start again. A request went out for subscriptions, with £1000 being collected, including £500 from Dr Backhaus. Bishop Goold who provided £100 laid the foundation stone of the new building. Named after St Kilian, the church honoured its German-born pastor and mainly Irish congregation; St Kilian, native of Ireland became bishop and martyr of Franconia in Germany and a saint who is revered in Paderborn, birthplace of Dr Backhaus. Designed by architects George & Schneider and built for the sum of £7500, the new slate-roofed, sandstone church was opened by Bishop Goold on 6 December 1857. Measuring 130 feet by 40 feet with walls 30 feet high, the Gothic building had 22 buttresses with double-lancet windows between each pair. There were four entrances and three large porches.

## St Kilian's Organ

Dr Backhaus presented a German-made organ to the church in 1871. Built by August Randebroek in Paderborn, in 1860, it was transferred to the new church in 1888.

## St Kilian's Bell

When Bishop Gould left in April 1867 to visit Rome, he was accompanied by Dean Hayes of Bendigo. After Hayes' death from an illness in Dublin the following year, Dr Backhaus arranged for a fitting memorial by erecting a four-foot high church bell. When it arrived from London in July 1869, a procession was arranged to convey it from the station. (More recently the bell has been repaired and refurbished in Adelaide.)

## Backhaus Dies

Dr Henry Backhaus died on 7 September 1882. In 1872 he had been created a Dean, and remained in full charge of the district until 1875, when the northern part of Victoria was formed into a Diocese, and Dr Crane appointed Bishop. Backhaus was appointed Vicar-General, a position which he held till 1880 when Dr Reville succeeded him. Some 30,000 people from all creeds gathered at his funeral. He bequeathed his vast estate of properties to the church. One of these allotments became the site for Sacred Heart Cathedral.

## History of Place:

By 1887 the sandstone church was in a bad state of repair, and accordingly in October 1887, Bishop Crane signed a contract for a new church. Designed by local architect W. C. Vahland, the new church was again Gothic in style, but was built of oregon and hardwood with a kauri ceiling. Constructed by Z. Button, the building was 110 by 54 feet with a sanctuary 30 feet deep, and was intended to serve as a temporary church until such time that a cathedral could be built.

After its completion in 1888 the old stone church was demolished. The new building, known as the Pro-Cathedral of St Kilian, was officially blessed and opened on 1 July 1888, with Bishop Crane celebrating the Pontifical High Mass. A new altar and shrine in the church dedicated to Our Lady of Good Counsel was a gift from 500 members of the Confraternity, the statue being obtained the following year in Munich by Bishop Reville. A relic of the True Cross, presented to Bishop Crane in Rome, was exposed for the first time in the church in 1891. Early in 1894, Mrs J. O'Connell, in memory of Dr Backhaus, donated a steel tower to replace the wooden structure that had previously housed the Dean Hayes memorial bell which survived from the old sandstone church. After the opening of the Sacred Heart Cathedral in 1901, St Kilian's became a parish church. The sacristy on the liturgical north side of the sanctuary was added to the church some years later. A new granite-based fence constructed from ornate iron was also added in the late nineteenth century. The fence extends down the Chapel Street side of the church and along the front of the church precinct in McCrae Street.

## William Charles Vahland, Architect of St Kilian's

Vahland was born in 1828 at Neinberg, Hanover, and entered the Bougewerkschule at Holzminden, an engineering and building academy in 1846. He graduated in 1852 and worked as an architect before arriving in Melbourne in 1854. Meeting with little success on the goldfields he turned to his architectural skills and designed a two-storey building for H. Sharp & Co., Pall Mall, which was later to become the Lyceum Hotel, now the site of the Bendigo Advertiser. By 1857 he had established an architectural practice in partnership with Robert Getschmann at Temple Court Chambers, Pall Mall. Their buildings include the Town Hall (1878-86), Hospital (1898), St John's Church, the Benevolent Home (1864, 1872, 1902), the second Shamrock Hotel (1860, replaced 1897), the Alexandra Fountain (1881), City Family Hotel (1872), Wesleyan Church (1877), Mechanics Institute (verandah 1891), Henry Jackson Store (1861, 1872), Post Office Hotel (1870), Connelly Store (1877), Commercial bank of Australia (1875), Atkinson Buildings (1877), Rifle Brigade Hotel (1887), Masonic Hall & Temple (1873, 1890), Bendigo Art Gallery (1867), Residence at 32 View Street (1871), Temperance Hall (1860), Sandhurst Club (1893), National Bank (1887), Colonial Bank (1887), former photographic studio (1886), St James Hall (1873).

He was also responsible for the Town Hall & Court House in Echuca in the 1860s. The partnership ceased on the death of Getschmann (b. 1824) in 1875. During 1892 Vahland admitted his son, Henry Ernest to the business to trade as Vahland & Son which continued until 1901 when Henry formed a partnership with John Beebe in Bull Street. This lasted until Henry's death in 1902. William succeeded his son in the partnership until 1910. He died on 21 July 1915 aged 86.

## Associated People:

Assoc.People BACKHAUS, DR H

## Extent of Registration

1. All the building including the German organ marked B1; iron and granite fence to Chapel and McCrae Streets, and the iron fence surrounding Dr Backhaus' grave marked B2; Dr Backhaus' grave marked B3; bell-tower and bell marked B4; on Diagram 600048 held by the Executive Director.
2. All the land marked L1 on Diagram 600048, held by the Executive Director, being part of the land described in Certificate of Title Vol 1038 Folio 537, City and Parish of Sandhurst, County of Bendigo.
3. All the specified movable objects: marble and granite baptismal font; 56 curve-ended pews; organ bench seat; Dr Backhaus' stump chair; small nave table; high altar and reredos; high altar side table; the altar; altar candlestick; the sedile; two side altars; two side altar tables.
4. All the *Washingtonia robusta* (Washington palms); the *Phoenix canariensis* (Canary Island palms); and the *Trachycarpus fortunei* (Chinese windmill palm); marked T1, T2 and T3 respectively on Diagram 600048, held by the Executive Director.

*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/>*