

# CAPITAL THEATRE (FORMER MASONIC HALL)



MASONIC HALL SOHE 2008



2015. Bendigo Capital Theatre. Source: denisbin, via Flickr.



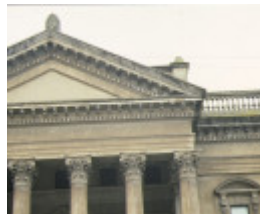
2023. Interface between original building and 1890 extension. 1890 extension was never rendered.



1 masonic hall bendigo front view



2023. Masonic emblem to door frame.



masonic hall bendigo detail pediment



2023. Ground level right of way to ground floor of 1890 extension.



2023. Bendigo Bank Theatre, former Lodge Room



2023. Capital theatre viewed from opposite side of view street.



Aerial view of registered extent.



2023. Inside entrance portico, view of Corinthian column.



2023. Theatre with auditorium seating (former Main Hall).

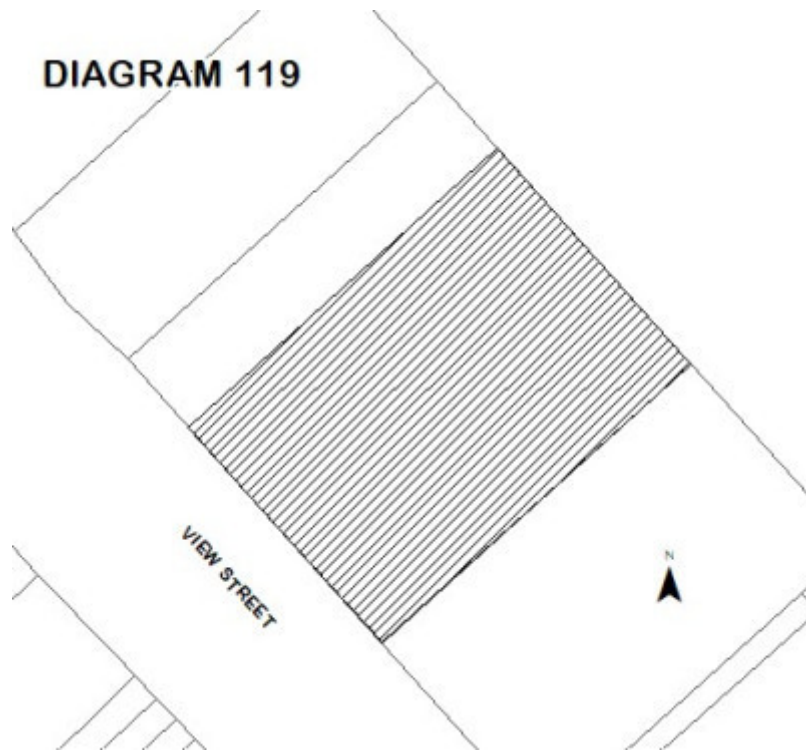


Diagram 119 2

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### Location

50-56 VIEW STREET BENDIGO, GREATER BENDIGO CITY

### Municipality

GREATER BENDIGO CITY

### Level of significance

Registered

### Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0119

### Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO270

### VHR Registration

October 9, 1974

### Amendment to Registration

October 10, 2024

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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### Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 1, 2025

Capital Theatre is located on Dja Dja Wurrung Country.

## What is significant?

The Capital Theatre (former Masonic Hall) Bendigo, a cement rendered building designed in the Renaissance Revival style by Bendigo architects William Charles Vahland and Robert Getzschmann in 1874. At the time of construction, the building housed several public and private uses, including lodge rooms, a tavern, and a concert hall that was later converted to a theatre.

## How is it significant?

The Capital Theatre (former Masonic Hall), Bendigo is of historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

Criterion A

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

Criterion D

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

## Why is it significant?

The Capital Theatre (former Masonic Hall) is historically significant due to associations with freemasonry, which played a long and important role in the cultural life of Victorian towns. The large and impressive building is illustrative of the strength of the freemason community in Bendigo and the importance it played in the development of the goldfields town from its early establishment in 1854. The Hall provided a focus for their activities and made a statement about their influence and role in the community. It is also significant for the important role it played in the wider community as a venue for a variety of activities, from its construction in 1874, through to the present day. Alterations from the 1890s onwards have emphasised public use in this centrally located building, accommodating various forms of entertainment.

(Criterion A)

The Capital Theatre (former Masonic Hall) is architecturally significant as an important and largely intact example of the work of Bendigo architects, Vahland and Getzschmann, who were both members of the lodge and architects who executed many buildings in the Bendigo area. As one of the founding members of the Golden and Corinthian Masonic Lodge in Bendigo, Secretary of the Lodge for 47 years and Past Deputy Grand Master in Bendigo, Vahland's close association with freemasonry is of significance as architect of the building. The Hall is an outstanding example of the large-scale application of the Corinthian order to the classical temple form. The adoption of a temple form for Masonic buildings is illustrative of the ideas of freemasons, heightened by the use of allegorical references to freemasonry in the interior detailing. The imposing front facade also contributes to the

streetscape of View Street, one of the finest groups of nineteenth century buildings in Victoria.  
(Criterion D)

## 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 Conditions: 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 Conditions: 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. **Note:** All archaeological places have the potential to contain significant sub-surface artefacts and other remains. In most cases it will be necessary to obtain approval from the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria before the undertaking any works that have a significant sub-surface component.

**General Conditions: 3.** If there is a conservation policy and plan all works shall be in accordance with it. **Note:** A Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan.

**General Conditions: 4.** Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.

**General Conditions: 5.** Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable.

**Minor Works :** **Note:** Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works must submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted.

### Exempt works and activities

1. Maintenance, like for like replacement and demolition of tiered seating to upper hall.
2. Maintenance, repair, replacement, upgrade, and removal of lighting and sound equipment. Replacement must use existing penetrations where possible and must not require cutting or chasing into early or original fabric.

## Theme

### 8. Building community life 9. Shaping cultural and creative life

Construction dates	1873, 1889,
Architect/Designer	Vahland & Getzschmann,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	Masonic Hall, Capital Theatre,
Hermes Number	145
Property Number	

## History

### Freemasonry in Bendigo

The origins of Freemasonry are thought to trace back to Medieval English stonemason's guilds. Masons working on large projects organised themselves into guilds, and from the 1600s began accepting non-masons, known as speculative or 'free' masons, whose morals aligned with that of the guild. By the eighteenth century, freemasonry had spread to the rest of Europe and America, and meetings were typically held in inns or taverns until the first purpose-built lodge was constructed in England in 1774. Masonic lodges developed codes of practice which evolved into a formalised structure with associated rituals. Values of the freemasons included fraternity, community and charitable works, and the practice of moral and social virtue.

The first recorded Masonic gathering in Australia took place in Sydney in 1803. The first lodge in Bendigo was established in 1854. By 1866 there were three lodges in Bendigo, the original Golden Lodge, and two breakaway groups, the Corinthian and Zenith Lodges. The first purpose-built hall was erected in Myers Street in 1855, but as membership of all three lodges continued to grow so did the need for a larger hall. In 1866, the Golden and Corinthian Lodges agreed to purchase two blocks of land on View Street jointly for the construction of a new temple. The Golden and Corinthian Lodge was officially formed in 1872, the same year that Lodge members William Vahland and Robert Getzschmann were appointed to design the new Hall (now Capital Theatre).

### Vahland and Getzschmann

William Charles Vahland was a German-born architect who received a technical education at the *Baugewerkschule* in Holzminden, Germany. He emigrated in 1854, and after finding no luck on the goldfields began his architectural career. In 1857 he entered a partnership with Robert Getzschmann, who had arrived in Victoria some years prior in 1849. Vahland and Getzschmann's architectural output was prolific, comprising a series of churches, schools, banks, hotels, private residences and theatres across country Victoria, southern New South Wales and in Napier, New Zealand. Vahland is understood to have been the principal design force of the partnership, and he continued the practice after Getzschmann's death in 1875.

## The Masonic Hall

Work commenced on construction of the building in 1873 with the laying of the foundation stone. The building was completed in 1874 to a Classical Revival design and with a south-west aspect to View Street. The building itself was divided into a private and a public section, the latter including a tavern at ground floor and a concert hall above. Separate entrances from the front portico were provided for private and public use. The Masonic section occupied the northern side of the building at ground floor level and included a lodge room at the rear, a library and reading room, and other affiliated rooms.

The tavern, later known as the Masonic Hotel (Masonic Shades Hotel, or 'The Shades'), occupied the basement and ground floor of the southern side of the building and included a sitting room, parlours, billiards room, bedrooms, kitchen, cellars and servants' rooms. It appears that two public entrances were provided for in this section, one directly from street level into the basement, the other from the public entry hall.

The other public area was an upper-level hall, with a removeable stage at the southeastern end of the space, and a balcony over the gallery to the northwestern end. It was an unusually large hall, believed to be the largest hall in Victoria at the time of construction, except for the Melbourne Town Hall. The hall was used by both Lodge members for Masonic purposes and the wider community for social events.

The popularity of the upper-level hall as a venue resulted in the enlargement of the building in 1890 to a design by Vahland. In 1887, the decision had been made to purchase a strip of land to the immediate west to accommodate a future extension, on the condition that a ground floor level right-of-way be maintained to allow fire fighting vehicles access to the rear of the fire station. At the first floor, the hall was extended with a new stage and proscenium constructed at the northwestern end.

## Twentieth century

The hall was being used as a cinema as early as 1909, and in 1912 'The Masonic' or 'Masonic Theatre' was leased by West's Pictures and renamed 'The New Britannia', (later the Capitol, then Capital Theatre). The Masonic Hotel was closed in the 1920s following the cancellation of its liquor license.

Alterations were made to the building in the twentieth century. In the late 1920s the Masonic rooms on the ground floor were transformed into one space forming a lower hall, which was used as a dance venue. By 1952, the upper hall was converted back to a live theatre, and it was in use until the building's closure in 1977 due to fire risk. The Lodge was relocated to a new building in 1983. In 1987, in response to a community campaign to save the theatre, the Marong, Strathfieldsaye and Eaglehawk municipalities of Bendigo purchased the former Masonic Hall and the former fire station. Renovations began in 1989 and the building was officially reopened in 1991 as a theatre.

## Extent of Registration

### Heritage Act 2017

#### NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 2017**, I give notice under section 53 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by modifying a place in the Heritage Register:

Number: H0119

Category: Registered Place

Place: Capital Theatre (former Masonic Hall)

Location: 50-56 View Street Bendigo

Municipality: Greater Bendigo City

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 119 encompassing that part of Consolidated Plan 172110 representing the building and land occupied by the Capital Theatre (former Masonic Hall) inclusive of the front steps, abutments and lamps adjacent to View Street but excluding the land to the north-west occupied by the abutting former Bendigo Fire Station (H1334).

10 October 2024  
STEVEN AVERY  
Executive Director

*[Victorian Government Gazette G 41 10 October 2024 p2041, correction G 43 24 October 2024]*

*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/>*