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# Buninyong Heritage precinct



BUNINYONG HERITAGE  
PRECINCT

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## Location

LEARMONTH STREET, SCOTT STREET, AND WARRENHEIP STREET, BUNINYONG, BALLARAT CITY

## Municipality

BALLARAT CITY

## Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO181

## Heritage Listing

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - July 14, 2025

### What is significant?

### How is it significant?

### Why is it significant?

The Buninyong Precinct is **historically** significant at a **LOCAL** level (AHC criterion A3, 4 and H.1).

*(a) the place's importance in the course, or pattern, of Australia's natural or cultural history;*

*(a3) importance in exhibiting unusual richness or diversity of built landscapes and cultural features;*

*(a4) & (h1) importance for association with events, developments, cultural phases and individuals which have had a significant role in the human occupation and evolution of the region.*

Buninyong is historically important for its association with the early settlement of Port Phillip from Van Diemens Land, when fleets of small boats carrying sheep crossed Bass Strait to land at Corio in 1836. The pastoral runs near Buninyong were taken up in 1838 and 1839 by Learmonth, Scott and Inglis at Yendon. All three names are remembered by the street names in the first survey.

Buninyong is historically important for its association with the Watharrung people, the Indigenous people who gave the name Buninyong to the nearby volcanic hill where the small township began to develop in the early 1840s, for men employed by the squatters. The township took its name from the mountain and made it its icon. The road to Portland Bay, known also as the Great Western Road, ran past the township and provided the trade link necessary for it to become established, while later the Warrenheip Road to Ballarat became the main gold fields route from Geelong.

Buninyong is historically important for its association with Reverend Thomas Hastie, who established a church and the first inland boarding school at Buninyong, in 1848 where thirty-one boarders and twenty-two day scholars were enrolled. Buninyong is historically important as it was established in 1848 with original town survey before the gold rush and settlement at Ballarat. By 1850 William Malcolm, a Government Surveyor had completed the town layout for a mile square township. The first land sales took place in May 1851.

The Precinct is historically important for its association with the early gold finds by Thomas Hiscock in 1851 and later rush in 1856, when the Durham Lead and Black Lead, Napoleon Lead, Durham Lead, Scotchmans Lead, Webb Hill Lead were mined close to Buninyong. Mining activity brought formal government development to the town as evidenced by many early structures.

These include the Magistrates Court, Ballarat gaining the supremacy early as a County Court. Judge Warrington Rogers of this County Court built a house in Buninyong in 1859. The Buninyong Court was also a busy Licensing Court. The temporary court accommodation was replaced in 1858 by a Police Court and Wardens Office both built of stone, and in 1859 a brick police station was erected in close proximity. One stone building survives as well as the brick police station. These remained in use until 1888 when new offices were built in Learmonth Street. Nearby, a brewery was erected in 1856 and a Roads Board was established in 1858, with a Municipal Council in 1859. By 1861-62 the Buninyong Township was thriving with five hotels, four churches, one bank and three schools, in addition to many residences as well as a Public Library and the Buninyong Botanic Gardens which were gazetted as a temporary reserve that same year (and some years later in 1889 the 10-acre site was permanently reserved as a Public Gardens). The government constructed a reservoir in 1861 to supply water to the miners.

The Buninyong Precinct is of importance for the location and development of the outstanding Buninyong Botanic Gardens (1861) and Gong reservoir. Special features include the swimming pool (created in 1873 from a bluestone lined water storage built to augment the supply in the large town reservoir), a caretaker's cottage, a bowling green, two tennis courts, two ponds (one a pond of reflection), and a rotunda. Built in 1901, it was the first memorial to Queen Victoria built in the state of Victoria after her death.

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Buninyong is historically important for its association with the Watharrung people, the Indigenous people of the area and the nearby volcanic hill, Mount Buninyong, which forms a visually important iconic backdrop to the town, and which has been the subject of many historic paintings and illustrations. Buninyong is historically important for its association with the early settlement of Port Phillip and the pastoral runs near Buninyong taken up by Learmonth, Scott and Inglis in 1838 and 1839. It is an important pre-gold rush town, established in 1848 near the Warrenheip River on the main road to Portland Bay, and later the main route to the Ballarat goldfields from Geelong. It is associated with Reverend Thomas Hastie, who established an early church and first inland boarding school at Buninyong. By 1850 William Malcolm, a Government Surveyor had completed the town layout plan and first land sales took place in 1851.

The Precinct is historically important for its association with the early gold finds by Thomas Hiscock in 1851 and later gold rush in 1856, when many nearby Leads were mined.

The Precinct is historically important for its association with gold mining activities which stimulated government development in the town as evidenced by many early structures, which remain substantially intact. These sites include in 1858 a Police Court and Wardens Office, and in 1859 a brick police station and residence of Judge Warrington Rogers of Ballarat County Court. These buildings retained their function until 1888 when new offices were built in Learmonth Street. Nearby, a brewery was erected in 1856 and a Roads Board was established in 1858, with a Municipal Council in 1859. The government constructed a reservoir in 1861 to supply water to the miners, and by then Buninyong Township was thriving with five hotels, four churches, one bank and three schools, in addition to many residences as well as a Public Library and the Buninyong Botanic Gardens which were gazetted as a temporary reserve that same year (and some years later in 1889 the 10-acre site was permanently reserved as a Public Gardens).

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The Buninyong Heritage Precinct is **architecturally** significant at a **LOCAL** level (AHC criteria D.2, E.1).

*(d) its importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of: (i) a class of Australia's Cultural places; or (ii) a class of Australia's cultural environments (including way of life, custom, process, land-use, function, design or technique);*

*(e) its importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group.*

Buninyong Precinct is important for its collection of buildings, architecture and overall development associated with the early settlement of this area by squatters in the 1840s followed by gold diggers, and the subsequent development from the early 1850s of a formally surveyed grid street layout which preceded that of Ballarat. The small rural township is strongly characterized by long straight streets organized in a dominant grid pattern. The civic and cultural/community buildings, in particular, are reminders of the separate historic foundations of the former municipality of Buninyong through which community facilities, organizations and cultural identity became distinctly separate from Ballarat.

The former Buninyong Town Hall is of particular architectural significance for its dominant location and grandiose design as the civic centre of the Shire of Buninyong. The remaining early buildings of the town are important examples of the development of the town in a beautiful landscape setting with a backdrop of forests which still echo the original beauty and history of this important village.

Buninyong Precinct is important for its classical 19th century colonial urban design. The street pattern remains essentially as surveyed in the early 1850s, with the centre of the town dominated by two main roads which were critical to its establishment. These include Learmonth Street (Midland Highway), which provides an important east-west oriented axis through the middle of the precinct, and is historically part of the early route from the Pyrenees to Geelong, and Warrenheip Road, the early gold route from Geelong to the Ballarat gold fields. The

intersection where these two roads cross is a visually dominant central feature of Buninyong, and is highlighted by the location of landmark buildings on the corners of the intersection. The group of commercial shops with street verandahs that line the corner add to the historical importance of Warrenheip Road, as the main road to the Ballarat goldfields.

The Precinct demonstrates many original and intact design qualities associated with the commercial, civic, cultural/community and educational developments in the township between the 1850s and early decades of the 20th century. They are complemented by a number of substantially intact residential buildings, which were constructed from the 1850s to the Inter-War era.

Most of the historic residential buildings in the Buninyong Precinct were erected in the Victorian era from the 1850s to the 1890s, with the remainder being erected in the first few decades of the 20th century. They generally represent a heterogeneous collection of different styles which are well distributed throughout the precinct. There are a number of houses with notable architectural designs which are scattered through the township, and beyond the precinct boundaries. Overall, there is a high level of integrity with many brick chimneys adorning the rooflines throughout the precinct. The houses range in scale with examples of larger villas as well as small cottages, usually set in mature gardens.

The Buninyong Precinct is **aesthetically** significant at a **LOCAL** level (AHC criteria D.2, E.1).

*(d) its importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of: (i) a class of Australia's Cultural places; or (ii) a class of Australia's cultural environments (including way of life, custom, process, land-use, function, design or technique);*

*(e) its importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group.*

The Buninyong Precinct, as well as the entire township is particularly characterized by its distinctive rural setting in a valley surrounded by treed ridges and with an eastern horizon dominated by Mount Buninyong and northern boundary defined by the beautiful Warrenheip River, which meanders past the rear allotments of the town. The visual qualities of this historical cultural landscape are strengthened by the historical, cultural and architectural development of the precinct, which remains substantially intact and well preserved.

Important vistas and view corridors that contribute to the character of the Precinct include the panoramic views across the town to the surrounding countryside as well as to Mount Buninyong in the east. Unobstructed views of Mount Buninyong dominate the viewscape, and are an outstanding element of the townscape. Other important topographical views include the treed ridges of the 'Grammar School Hill' and of the Union Jack Reserve that edge the horizon in the north; the former Recreational Ground (now the Golf Club) in the west; as well as the historically important open spaces in the south afforded by larger residential acreages, farmland, former market gardens, the former Durham Lead diggings and the Learmonth's former pastoral property.

The Buninyong Precinct is aesthetically important for its early street planting which was mostly of European exotic species. The avenues and mature trees, in particular elm, oak and ash trees as well as some historic native trees are important to the town's character. The tree lined avenues form important views along many roads; in particular the central avenues of the main streets and across many of the gridded blocks to the rear and sides of various houses within the precinct. Learmonth Street, to the east of Warrenheip Street, features an avenue of large mature oak trees located within the two grassed median strips between the service lanes and the main road thoroughfare. There are also a number of mature elm trees in front of the former Shire Offices and Court House. An Avenue of Honour, which was planted to commemorate the First World War, extends along Learmonth Street, west of Warrenheip Street, toward the Golf Course. The Avenue includes mature silver poplars, oaks and elms. There is also an important row of mature elm trees on the west side of Inglis Street, adjacent to the present Uniting Church.

The Buninyong Precinct is aesthetically important for the variety of significant historic urban landmarks. These comprise views of the churches and their associated buildings, but particularly the Uniting Church with its distinctive tower and its open park-like setting; the former civic buildings along Learmonth Street, but particularly the former Buninyong Town Hall with its notable Italianate styling and dominant central tower; the various commercial buildings along Learmonth and Warrenheip Streets, but particularly the verandahed shops, the Crown Hotel and former National Bank of Australasia, which both form important focal points of interest on separate corners of the intersection of these streets, and the former Eagle Hotel at 507 Warrenheip Street with its elaborate detailing; the notable former Mechanics Institute and Free Library, and the dominant Masonic Lodge and Buninyong State School No.1270, which all face Warrenheip Street. The distinctive Victorian era residences,

some of which feature notable picturesque Victorian Gothic styling; the striking form of the Bunya Pine in the front garden of 'Netherby' at 606 Warrenheip Street; the open landscape of the De Soza Park with its stands of mature conifers, which provides a scenic recreational focus within the dominant commercial area of this part of the precinct; and the diverse landscaping and mature woodland appearance of the Buninyong Botanical Gardens and the adjacent Gong, which provide a scenic recreational focus within the dominant residential area of this part of the precinct.

The important historic visual qualities of the precinct are also enhanced by treatment of roads and verges which form a significant component of most of the streetscapes. These include the gravel/grass road shoulders of a number of the roads; by the turf nature strips with open, earth-formed street drains; by areas of grassed and variously landscaped public and private open spaces and the many private gardens with their mature canopy trees. These landscaped and treed areas provide the precinct with a semi-rural garden setting of considerable variety.

The Buninyong Botanic Gardens and the adjacent lake area known as 'The Gong' are considered to be of State significance (Victorian Heritage Register No. H1826), and are of considerable aesthetic significance to the Precinct. They form an important landscaped area in the Precinct with their mature woodland appearance, and many mature shrubs and trees survive from the early years of the planting of the Botanic Gardens. De Soza Park and the R.S.L. Memorial Park are other important open areas in the precinct and they variously feature landscaped areas of grass, shrubs and mature trees. The small mound and adjacent wire fenced enclosure in De Soza Park are the last visible remains of the 'Crown Mine' mullock heap and shaft.

The Buninyong Precinct is **socially** significant at a **LOCAL** level (AHC criterion G.1).

*(g) the place's strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.*

The Buninyong Precinct is recognized and highly valued by the local community for its early and predominantly ongoing residential, commercial, civic, educational, social, religious, and recreational associations.

The Buninyong Botanic Gardens are of social significance attracting picnickers from a wide area to view the Gardens and plant collection, and to drink the spring waters.

The South Ballarat Precinct is **scientifically** significant at a **LOCAL** level (AHC criteria C.2 and F1).

*(c) its potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Australia's natural or cultural history;*  
*(f) importance for its technical, creative, design or artistic excellence, innovation or achievement.*

The Buninyong Precinct is of scientific importance for its early infrastructure development, which demonstrates the technical achievements of the early inhabitants. Examples include in particular the large bluestone lined, arched culvert with bluestone wing walls that carries the Union Jack Creek under the Midland Highway (Warrenheip Street) at the north edge of the precinct and the reservoir and water reticulation system of the Botanic Gardens. The use of bluestone pitchers as the principal material to form this type of engineering infrastructure also demonstrates an early, and now rarely used construction technology, as well as the excellence of traditional craftsmanship.

The Buninyong Precinct is of importance for the Buninyong Gardens (1861) have scientific (botanical) significance due to their collection of plants, especially conifers, with the *Abies pinsapo* as an outstanding specimen of this uncommon species. The two *Acer opalus subsp. obtusatum* is rare in cultivations, only three other specimens are known in Victoria and the *Acer platanoides* 'Crimson King' and *Acer platanoides* are outstanding examples of the species.

Construction dates 1855,

Hermes Number 156824

## Physical Description 1

The township of Buninyong is located some 10 kilometres south-east of Ballarat on the Midland Highway. The Buninyong Heritage Precinct is characterised by a notable collection of former and present commercial, cultural/community, and educational buildings constructed from the 1850s onwards. They are complemented by a number of substantially intact residential buildings, which were constructed from the 1850s to the Inter-war era. The precinct is also characterised by the formal grid layout of its streets, some of which feature avenues of mature to semi-mature trees; by scattered areas of grassed and treed public and private open space including the Buninyong Botanic Gardens, De Soza Park and the park-like grounds of the Uniting Church; and by a number of well-maintained private gardens, most of which contain notable mature tree specimens. Furthermore, the precinct is distinguished by some early engineering infrastructure such as the large bluestone culvert that carries the Union Jack Creek under the Ballarat-Buninyong Road.

The northernmost boundary of the Buninyong Heritage Precinct lies on the north side of the intersection of the Ballarat-Buninyong Road with the Union Jack Creek. \* From this point the east boundary begins, first running in a southerly direction to Forest Street, along the rear of the allotments lining the east side of Warrenheip Street (the Ballarat-Buninyong Road). At Forest Street the boundary takes a staggered line, firstly turning to run along the south side of Forest Street before turning again to run alongside the east boundaries of the allotments at 313 Forest Street and 314 Learmonth Street. After it reaches Learmonth Street, the boundary runs along the north side of the road reserve to the eastern side of the intersection with Cornish Street before turning again to run across Learmonth Street and along the east side of the Cornish Street road reserve for a short distance. When the boundary line reaches 605 Cornish Street, it deviates to take in 605 and 607 Cornish Street before running along the north side of Scott Street for some distance.

The easternmost boundary is then formed from a point on the north side of Scott Street, and along the east boundary of the land belonging to the St Peter's and St Paul's Catholic Church, to a point on the south side of the surveyed line of Yuille Street. From this point the boundary turns in a westerly direction, running to and then along the east side of Fiskin Street to Simpson Street.

The south boundary of the precinct essentially runs along the north side of the Simpson Street road reserve to Warrenheip Street before deviating to run along the south side of the first few allotments in Simpson Street. The west boundary begins on the west side of the allotment at 407 Simpson Street and takes a staggered line to Learmonth Street along the west sides of various allotments facing Simpson, Yuille, Scott and Learmonth Streets. At Learmonth Street the boundary line turns to run on the south side of the road reserve to the first bend in the road, which is essentially the end of the mature tree plantings of the Avenue of Honour, and then turns to run back again along the north side of Learmonth Street to the west side of the surveyed line of Winter Street. The west boundary line turns at this point to run along the west side of the Winter Street road reserve to Eyre Street and takes in the allotment at 208 Winter Street ('Clifton Villa') before turning to run along the north side of Eyre Street for a short distance. The remainder of the west boundary runs in a staggered line along the west boundaries of various allotments facing Eyre, Palmerston and Warrenheip Streets before ending at the northernmost boundary.

The Buninyong Precinct generally includes land either side of Warrenheip and Learmonth Street and extends as far south as Simpson Street and north of Elizabeth Street.

Buninyong was first settled in late 1830s by pastoralists and was a small town by the early 1840s, later supporting a clergyman, blacksmith, shoemaker and a medical practitioner. In 1848, the first inland boarding school, associated with a church was opened by The Reverend Thomas Hastie.

The discovery of gold in the area by Thomas Hiscock in 1851 brought prospectors from Geelong and other goldfields. This rush was short-lived but another find in 1856 triggered further growth in the township.

The first survey of the township was undertaken in 1850 and the first land sales occurred in 1851. The first local County Court and Court of General Sessions in the district opened in 1853, serving the Ballarat region until the 1860s. By the late 1850s -1860s Buninyong prospered as seen by the construction of many of the church buildings. Buninyong continued to develop in the 1870s after mining declined, with the construction of the Post Office, Police Quarters, Town Hall and Court House. The Buninyong gardens were established in 1888 which later included a number of recreational facilities. The Gardens were to become the social centre of the town.

Commercial building was continuous throughout the second half of the 19th century and is an indicator of the commercial prosperity of the town. By the 1920s the town had declined economically. Little change occurred to the town until the 1960s with the erection of the pre school centre and the R.S.L building.

The precinct is important as it shows many original and early examples of Victorian, residential, commercial, cultural/community and educational buildings built between the 1850s - 1930s. The precinct is also important as a settlement providing civic and commercial functions, predating nearby Ballarat.

Typically the residential buildings are single storey, mostly weatherboard with some face brick render construction. Roofs are either gabled or hipped and clad in either unpainted or painted corrugated iron. Houses display eaves and porches.

The commercial buildings are either one or two storeys in height, constructed from brick, bluestone or weatherboard. Most shops had post supported verandahs, with some still remaining.

The cultural/community buildings range in size but are generally constructed of brick or bluestone, sometimes rendered or over-painted. They mostly have steep pitched roofs clad in slate or corrugated iron and exhibit individual decorative detailing.

Key landmark buildings include the former Anglican and Methodist Churches and Presbyterian Church, the Crown Hotel and Shire Hall, other commercial and cultural buildings along Learmonth Street. Views from the precinct to Mt Buninyong and the surrounding treed horizon are also important.

Other visual features are the mature exotic street tree planting and in private gardens, the landscaped median strip including mature Elm trees in Learmonth Street, the Avenue of Honour consisting of Elms, Silver Poplar and Oak trees in Learmonth Street and the Botanical Gardens, which all contribute to the rural setting of the precinct. Also important is the location of the township within a treed landscape. The grassed verges, open street drainage and unsealed roads also add to the rural character of the precinct.

The Botanical Gardens contain important structures including the Bowling Club Pavilion, the Queen Victoria Rotunda, the Public baths, bridges and fencing. Several original stone fences remain, demarcating former paddocks and pastoral acres prospered as seen by the construction of many of the church buildings. Buninyong continued to develop in the 1870s after mining declined, with the construction of the Post Office, Police Quarters, Town Hall and Court House. The Buninyong gardens were established in 1888 which later included a number of recreational facilities. The Gardens were to become the social centre of the town.

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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/>*