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# FORMER WHITE HILLS READING ROOM & FREE LIBRARY



532 Napier Street, former  
White Hills Reading Rooms  
& Free Library



532 Napier Street, former  
White Hills Reading Rooms  
& Free Library (2)

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## Location

532 NAPIER STREET, WHITE HILLS, GREATER BENDIGO CITY

## Municipality

GREATER BENDIGO CITY

## Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO911

## Heritage Listing

Greater Bendigo City

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 10, 2023

### What is significant?

The White Hills Reading Rooms and Free Library at 532 Napier Street White Hills, designed by Robert F Nicolai and opened in 1913 is significant.

### How is it significant?

The former White Hills Reading Rooms and Free Library is of local historic and aesthetic significance to the City of Greater Bendigo.

### Why is it significant?

The former White Hills Reading Rooms and Free Library is significant as a community place set up for the enjoyment and education of the White Hills community. It belongs in the nineteenth century philanthropic tradition of Mechanic's Institutes and other community facilities set up to benefit working people prior to the introduction of free lending libraries as part of municipal services. Established by a committee of local businessmen including Albert Barnard Ratcliff, tea salesman; Jonathan Knight, law clerk; Edward Stuckenschmidt, postmaster; John Burnet, plumber; Walter Batchelder, dentist and Frederick Schleider, butcher; the White Hills Reading Rooms and Free Library is significant as a place for the education and enjoyment by the White Hills population. It is significant as part of the Bendigo Free Library and Reading Rooms operated by the same committee for a number of years prior to the White Hills facility being established. (Criterion A)

The White Hills Reading Rooms and Free Library designed by one of the nineteenth century German architects of Bendigo, Robert Nicolai; is an excellent example of an Edwardian style public building. The building has landmark qualities within the predominantly residential section of Napier Street as a result of its prominent siting close to the street and largely intact form and detailing addressing the street. It may comprise parts of the 1864 Wesleyan Church by W C Vahland which was removed to the site; however this has not been established.

The building is significant for its demonstration of some key characteristics of the Edwardian style including the roof forms, decorative bracketed eaves, half hipped roof, decorative metal ridging, casement window joinery (some sashes have been replaced), combination of linear and block fronted weatherboards and a brick chimney. The function of the building is well expressed through its form and the manner in which the entry porch with highly decorative barge boards, strapping and finial addresses the street. (Criterion E)

Heritage Study/Consultant	Greater Bendigo - White Hills & East Bendigo Heritage Study 2016, Context P/L, 2015;
Construction dates	1913,
Architect/Designer	Nicolai, Robert F.,
Hermes Number	198331
Property Number	

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## Physical Description 1

The former Library and Reading Rooms at 532 Napier Street White Hills is located within the crescent-shaped town layout of White Hills towards the front of the site, giving it a prominent position in the street. The large building comprises a large hall space for the library and billiard room and smaller ante rooms. The plan is laid out in an axial form with intersecting wing and small porch nestled between these. The timber building employs decorative elements through the combination of weatherboard and block fronted boards, bracketed eaves, barge boards, strapping and finial. The south wall is built of face brick. The corrugated iron roofs are finished with a detailed metal ridging and have ventilation ducts with conical 'hats' to the main hall space. The front of the hall is highlighted through the architectural design of the combination hip and gable roof with return bracketed eaves forming a highly decorative appearance.

Casement windows that are typical of the period have top lights and a pair of timber doors provides the entry from the porch. It appears as if the doors are replacements, however they are an appropriate style. Some of the casement sashes have been replaced with awnings. A red brick chimney is expressed on one wall. Despite some

additions at the rear, the hall retains its overall form and architectural character, and is an unusual building, reflecting its particular function and importance in the community.

*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/>*