
FORMER CUSTOMS HOUSE



FORMER CUSTOMS
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1 former customs house
echuca front view



former customs house
echuca side view

Location

2 LESLIE STREET AND 41 MURRAY ESPLANADE ECHUCA, CAMPASPE SHIRE

Municipality

CAMPASPE SHIRE

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0144

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO28

VHR Registration

October 9, 1974

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is significant?

Echuca developed as an important port from the early 1850s, when Henry Hopwood established a crossing place there. The Echuca Customs House was constructed in 1884 to administer customs regulations for the inter-colonial trade that were payable, until 1901, on goods imported to Victoria from the colonies of New South Wales and South Australia; this function dates back to late 1854, prior to the construction of the current building. It was one of only a small number of customs houses built on the Victorian side of the colonial border, and was the most important, situated as it was at the busy port of Echuca. The volume of trade at Echuca was greatly boosted after the arrival of a rail link to Melbourne in 1864. It was a site of competitive and often hostile relations between New South Wales and Victoria, and as such was as a key symbol of the economic need for the Federation of the Australian colonies, which had become critical by the 1890s.

The Echuca Customs House was designed and constructed by the Public Works Department of Victoria. The working drawings for the building were executed by J.H. Harvey under the direction of G. Watson. It features the Public Works Department's distinctive use of polychrome-banded brickwork and round-arch windows with pointed hood moulds and incised keystones. The single-storey structure has a hipped roof clad in slates and surmounted by iron finials. The fine detailing, joinery and workmanship are particularly notable.

How is it significant?

The Echuca Customs House is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Echuca Customs House site is historically significant for its role in collecting customs duties on inter-colonial trade across the Murray River. The building's substantial size and prominent siting demonstrates the importance placed on customs collection by Victoria's colonial government.

The Echuca Customs House is architecturally significant for its Gothic-inspired form. It is historically and architecturally significant as one of only two examples of customs houses on the Murray River known to survive in Victoria, and as a rare surviving example of a customs house designed and constructed by the Public Works Department of Victoria.

The Echuca Customs House is also historically significant as a critical element of the historic Echuca wharf precinct; it has an important relationship with the other elements in the precinct, including the Echuca Wharf (1867) and adjacent Shackell's Bond Store (1859) [H558], which are amongst Echuca's oldest riverfront buildings.

[Online Data Upgrade Project 2004]

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.

Construction dates	1884,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	419
Property Number	

History

This history was produced as part of an Online Data Upgrade Project October 2003.

From the mid-1850s, the Australian colonies regularly imposed customs duties on goods imported into them from their fellow colonies. The imposition of these duties was a cause of much rivalry, dispute and ill feeling among the colonies and one of the principal barriers to their coming together into a federation. A series of customs agreements operated between the colonies from late 1854 until late 1873 when agreement between the two senior colonies, Victoria and New South Wales, broke down irretrievably. Thereafter, the two colonies systematically collected customs duties at a series of customs houses erected on either side of the Murray River border.

The often antagonistic nature of customs collection along the Murray was exemplified in the rivalry between Echuca, in Victoria, and Moama, across the river in New South Wales. In the 1860s, the sub-collector of customs

at Moama, Charles Gordon, was instructed by his government to assert the authority of his office with 'firmness and determination, with a strict regard to the provisions of the law.' This mandate was strongly supported by constables of the New South Wales Police. Echuca punt owner Henry Hopwood protested Gordon's heavy-handed demeanour by enlisting the help of the Victorian government, returning from Melbourne with six police officers under Inspector Hare, who had instructions to protect Victorian vessels from undue interference by New South Wales Inspectors. Ensuing events led to a tense armed standoff between the Victorian and New South Wales police. Although common sense prevailed, it was probably the closest two Australian colonies had ever come to armed conflict with each other.

It is uncertain what facilities served customs collection in Echuca prior to the 1880s, although the building adjacent to the new customs house, Shackell's Bond Store (built 1859) may have been used. The Echuca Customs House was erected in 1884 by the Victorian Public Works Department. The working drawings were executed by J.H. Harvey under the direction of G. Watson. The ornate design, solid construction and money expended on erecting the Echuca Customs House stated the importance that the Victorian government attached to the collection of customs duties. As the building was clearly built to last, it suggests that at the time of its erection the Victorian government saw little prospect of a new customs agreement being reached with New South Wales. It was only when the colonies agreed at constitutional conventions in the 1890s that intercolonial customs would be abolished on creation of a federated nation that this major obstacle to federation was removed.

When collection of intercolonial duties finally ended in 1901 with Federation, the people of Echuca and Moama celebrated. A military band from Echuca led a decorated wagon carrying six young girls, each representing one of the federating colonies. The procession, including dignitaries and prominent citizens travelled slowly across the bridge and met a similar delegation from Moama exactly halfway, symbolising the removal of formal barriers between the two towns.

By 1930 the customs house had been sold to local accountant F. Lockwood, who used the premises as an office and lived at the rear. In 1983 the building was purchased by the Victorian Tourism Commission and it has been used since as a tourist information facility.

The draft statement of significance and the above history were produced as part of an Online Date Upgrade Project 2004. Sources were as follows:

Andrew Ward and Associates. 'City of Echuca Heritage Conservation Study'. 1992.

Extent of Registration

City of Echuca. No. 144. Former Customs House, Echuca, 2 Leslie Street, Echuca.
[*Victoria Government Gazette* No 100 Wednesday, October 9 1974 p.3648]

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/>