

## BAIRNSDALE COURT HOUSE



BAIRNSDALE COURT  
HOUSE SOHE 2008



bairnsdale courthouse  
nicholson street bairnsdale  
front elevation



2023 View from judges Bench



bairnsdale courthouse  
nicholson street bairnsdale  
entrance detail



Interior 2023



H1462 Bairnsdale Court  
House from the SW



bairnsdale courthouse  
nicholson street bairnsdale  
tower view



bairnsdale courthouse  
nicholson street bairnsdale  
rear view



Bairnsdale courthouse  
nicholson street bairnsdale  
behind modern PO replacing  
AJ Macdonald-designed post  
office



Bairnsdale Court House,  
1991



Bairnsdale Court House



Air vent 2023



2023 view



Front 2023



Public Gallery 2023



2023 view from judge's bench  
in court room one



2023 Judge's associate  
bench



2023 desk in judge's chamber

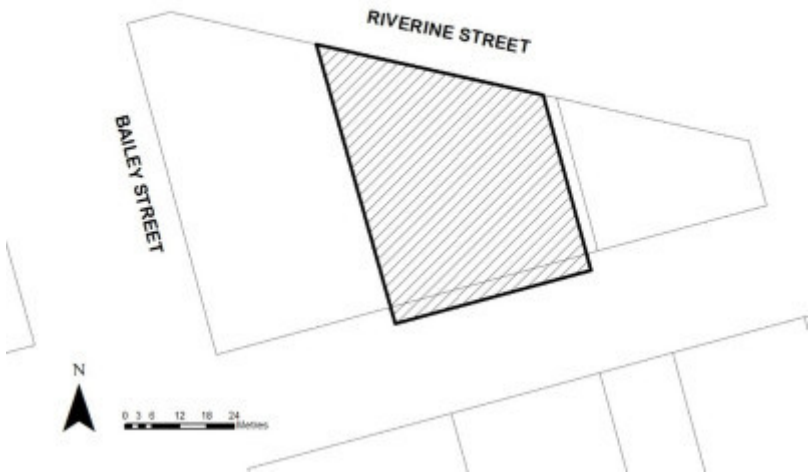


2023 Table and chairs from  
jury room



2023 Washbasin in courtroom

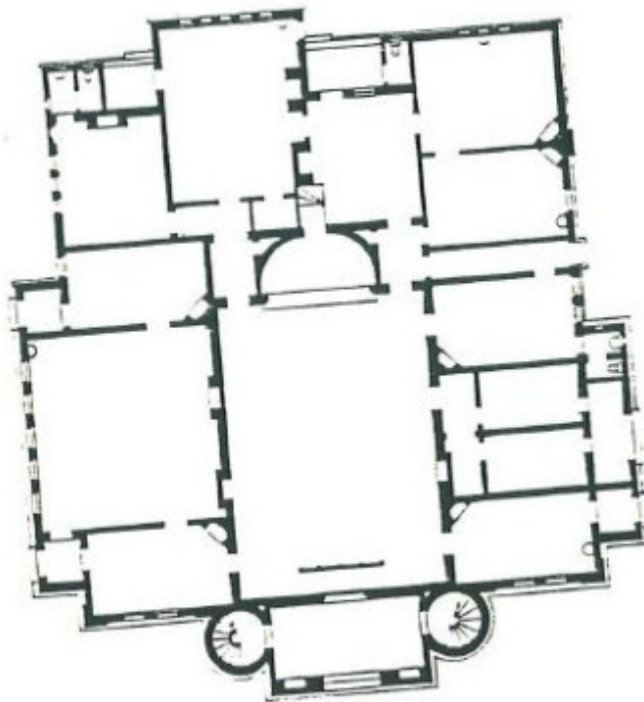
# DIAGRAM 1462



extent diagram

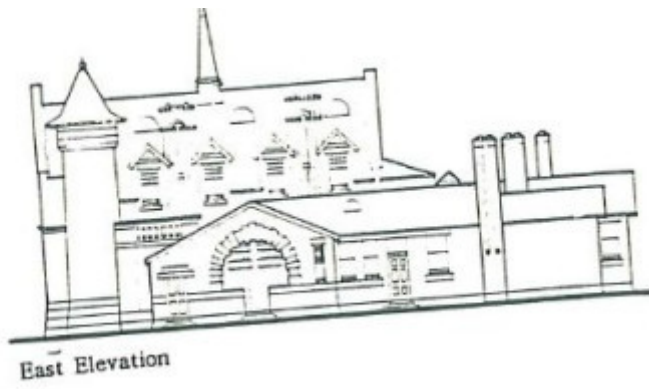


aerial extent

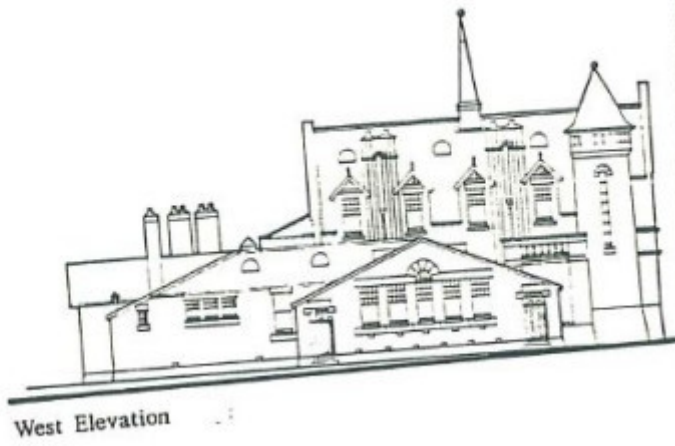


Ground Floor Plan

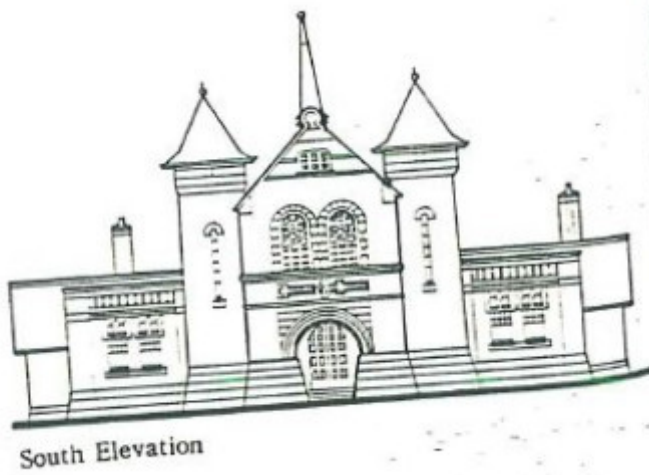
Bairnsdale Court House



Bairnsdale Court House

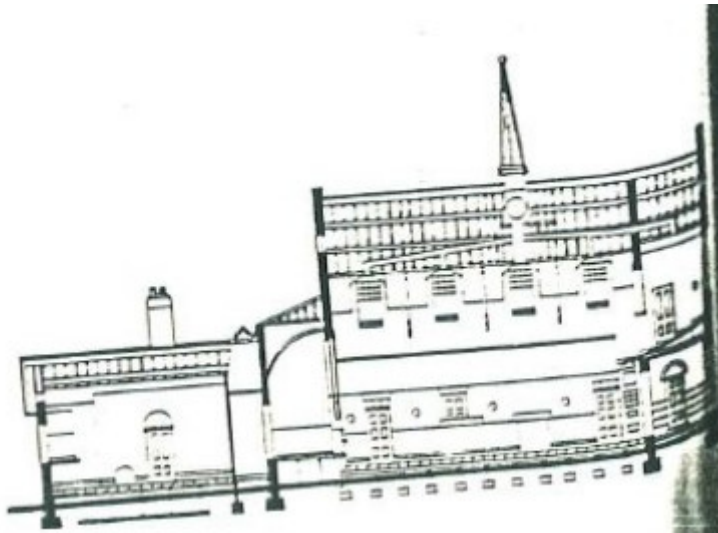


Bairnsdale Court House

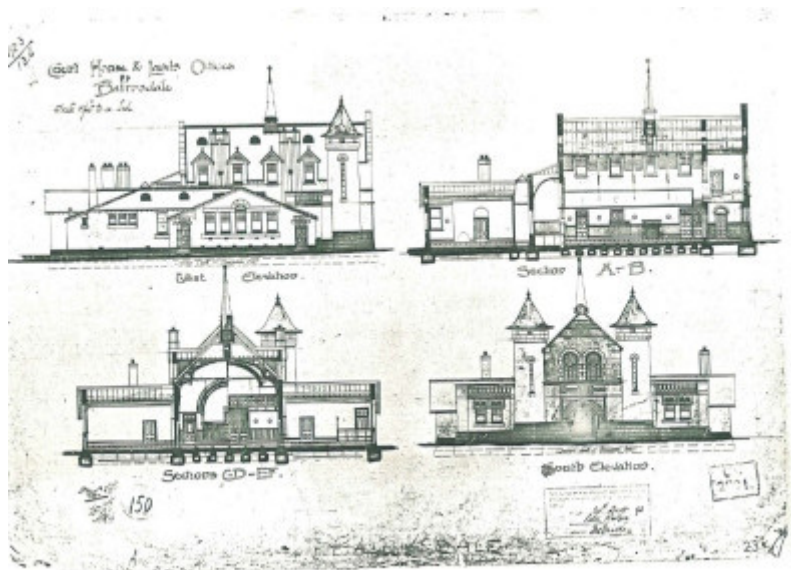


Bairnsdale Court House





Bairnsdale Court House



Bairnsdale Court House

## Location

14 NICHOLSON STREET BAIRNSDALE, EAST GIPPSLAND SHIRE

## Municipality

EAST GIPPSLAND SHIRE

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1462

## **Heritage Overlay Numbers**

HO114

## **VHR Registration**

August 20, 1982

## **Amendment to Registration**

January 11, 2024

## **Heritage Listing**

Victorian Heritage Register

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## **Statement of Significance**

Last updated on - August 19, 2025

# **What is significant?**

The Bairnsdale Court House is double-storey and of red brick construction (1893) designed by architect AJ Macdonald of the Victorian Public Works Department (PWD) in an eclectic blend of Art Nouveau, Romanesque, Queen Anne, and Scottish Baronial styles with Australian decorative elements, and objects integral being court room furniture.

# **How is it significant?**

The Bairnsdale Court House is of historical, architectural, and technical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the VHR:

### **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

### **Criterion F**

Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

# **Why is it significant?**

The Bairnsdale Court House is historically significant as an early Victorian example of the quest for an 'Australian' architectural style. Motifs on the front depict a koala, possum, snakes, and Eucalyptus leaves. These distinctly Australian details and motifs are combined with the inherited symbols of British justice in a highly picturesque building.

The Bairnsdale Court House is historically significant as a rare and highly intact example of court houses built in Victoria during the 1890s. It is notable for exhibiting a high degree of extravagance and optimism that was uncharacteristic of these economically depressed times. The building was also the first Victorian court house to introduce distinctively Australian decorative elements alongside traditional symbols of inherited British justice and is thus important for its potential to illustrate the acclimatisation of the justice system in Australia which gathered momentum in the lead-up to Federation. The original and altered internal spaces of the Bairnsdale Court House are historically significant for demonstrating aspects of the hierarchy and functions of law in Victoria since 1893. The original spaces of the court house, such as sex segregated witness rooms, also demonstrate attitudes to gender at the time of construction, in that women were provided for as witnesses and prisoners, but not in the official spaces in the court. The Koori Court also sits at the Bairnsdale Court House, an important initiative in Victoria from 2002.

(Criterion A)

The Bairnsdale Court House is architecturally significant as an outstanding example of a late nineteenth-century court house in Victoria. Its design is highly creative and exhibits an eclectic array of stylistic influences including Art Nouveau, Romanesque, Queen Anne and Scottish Baronial. It is historically significant as a building which anticipates many overseas styles and buildings of similar form, and which predates important buildings in the American Romanesque style in Melbourne and Sydney.

(Criterion D)

The Bairnsdale Court House is technically significant for the Tobin Tube ventilation system in the building which has survived with a high degree of integrity. It demonstrates an important technical innovation, adopted in many Victorian public buildings in the late nineteenth century. It was an important innovation for introducing fresh air into public buildings without creating draughts.

(Criterion F)

## 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](#).

## Theme

### 7. Governing Victorians

Construction dates	1892,
Architect/Designer	Macdonald AJ,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place, Registered object integral to a registered place,
Other Names	COURT, COURT HOUSE, BAIRNSDALE COURTHOUSE, BAIRNSDALE MAGISTRATES' COURT,
Hermes Number	56
Property Number	

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## History

The Bairnsdale Court House was built in 1893 during the severe economic depression of the 1890s during which few public court houses were built. The Bairnsdale Court House had been planned in more prosperous times, and once construction commenced it provided employment opportunities for builders and tradesmen. Designed by the Melbourne born, Edinburgh trained architect AJ Macdonald of the Victorian Public Works Department (PWD), the court house is extravagant in design and one of only sixteen works attributable to Macdonald. Macdonald's time with the PWD was brief, but his output notable, including the Omeo Court House (VHR H1536), Omeo Post Office (VHR H0650), and Flemington Court House and Police Station (VHR H1470). After retiring from architecture at thirty-two, Macdonald worked in several other State and Commonwealth departments, with a brief intermission during which he assisted Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin in the planning of Canberra.

The supervising architect for the Bairnsdale Court House was local resident, Harry French, and the builder for the project was Peter Rodger of Williamstown. Other tradesmen included local craftsmen and bricklayers. At the time priority was given to the sourcing of local materials for construction. An article in the Bairnsdale Advertiser after construction was completed refers to the use of 'the finest local red bricks, with stone dressings of Mount Taylor and Mount Lookout freestone, and mountain ash timber for the interiors'. Internally, a Tobin Tube system was installed for ventilation purposes. The Tobin Tube consisted of a horizontal opening in the exterior wall that connected to an opening on the inside of the wall with a vertical tube. At Bairnsdale, the Tobin tubes can still be opened and closed by hand with the ornamental vents in the rooms.

The building continues to be used as a court house and provides important court services to the East Gippsland region. While there have been minor updates over time, the court house remains intact to the era of its construction. The Bairnsdale Koori Court convenes in Court room 2 (the Magistrate's Court) around a large modern table. Mention that the local Koori Court convenes in Court Room 2, around a large modern table. The Koori Court at Bairnsdale marks an important development in Victoria's justice system

## Assessment Against Criteria

### Criterion

The *Bairnsdale Court House* is of historical, architectural, and technical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the VHR:

### 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

#### Criterion F

Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

### Extent of Registration

The Executive Director recommends that the extent of registration for Bairnsdale Court House be gazetted as: All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 1462 encompassing all of Allotment 2 Section 2A Township of Bairnsdale and part of the Nicholson Street road reserve extending from the building facade to the kerb and all the registered objects integral to the place which are listed in the inventory held by the Executive Director dated 18 September 2023, being the building's collection of 23 pieces of historic court room furniture.

[Victoria Government Gazette No. 2 11 January 2024 p20]

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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/>*