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# BEECHWORTH GAOL RESERVE

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## Location

WILLIAMS STREET BEECHWORTH, INDIGO SHIRE

## Municipality

INDIGO SHIRE

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H8225-0109

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO38

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - May 24, 2004

SEE H1549

### What is significant?

Beechworth Prison was designed by Victoria's Public Works Department between 1857 and 1864. The major drawings of 1858, 1860 and 1864 were executed by Gustav Joachimi under the direction of William Wardell, and the 1861 drawings were jointly executed by Joachimi and H.A. Williams. The prison was built in stages between 1858 and 1864 using granite quarried on site. H. Dalrymple and George Simmie were the contractors. Beechworth is one of nine Victorian prisons designed on the radiating panopticon principle which had proved an efficient, cost-effective design for easy surveillance of prisoners by allowing guards to watch over a large area from a central observation point. When opened in 1860, Beechworth provided single cells for 36 prisoners. Accommodation was doubled on the building's completion in 1864. The prison initially housed male and female prisoners, who were kept occupied with work of practical benefit to the town. Between 1918 and 1925 the prison closed from lack of numbers, then operated as a reformatory for habitual male offenders between 1925 and 1951. It became a training prison for straight-sentence prisoners after 1951 and continues as a prison today. Despite

numerous minor alterations since 1864, highly intact features include the cell blocks, observation hall, turnkey's quarters, gaoler's quarters, kitchen wing exterior, warder's quarters, watch towers, perimeter and division walls, the iron entrance gates, entrance court, and yards with the exception of the 1861 female yards which were built over in 1925. Original stairs, balustrades, architraves, skirtings, doors and windows also survive. Slate roofing has been replaced with corrugated iron and louvred ventilators have been removed from cell block roofs.

How is it significant?

Beechworth Prison is of historical, architectural, aesthetic and archaeological significance to the State of Victoria. It may contain sub-surface deposits with the potential to illuminate past use and occupation of the site.

Why is it significant?

Beechworth Prison is historically important as an intact example of the Public Works Department's most intensive prison building period immediately following the abolition of hulks and as an illustration of mid nineteenth century prison conditions.

It is historically important as the site of eight executions between 1865 and 1881. All eight prisoners were buried within the gaol under the Criminal Law and Practice Statute 1864.

It is also important for its early association with John Castieau, Victoria's Inspector General of Prisons from 1880 to 1884, who was gaoler at Beechworth between 1856 and 1869. Many early Beechworth prisoners were Chinese, and the prison is historically important for its association with this significant ethnic minority on the north-eastern goldfields. The building is historically important as a major architectural work of Gustav Joachimi, whose other designs include the entrance to Melbourne's Pentridge Prison (1858-9), Benalla Court House (1864), and A-Block and J-Block at Victoria Barracks (1860-7). It is historically important as a place where Ned Kelly, Australia's best-known bushranger, and his mother were both imprisoned in the 1870s, and as a place of incarceration for the bushranger Harry Power. The prison is historically important for its associations with the early development of Beechworth as the administrative centre of north-eastern Victoria. It is part of a major precinct of public buildings, and has links to numerous other buildings in Beechworth which used granite quarried and broken at the prison by male inmates.

Beechworth Prison is architecturally significant for its rarity as one of nine panopticon prisons erected in Victoria, and as one of only three which continue to operate as prisons. Its architecture epitomises the severely simple Classical style of nineteenth century prisons commissioned by the Public Works Department.

Beechworth Prison is aesthetically significant as an intact example of the restrained ornamentation and high construction qualities characteristic of the Public Works Department under William Wardell.

Other Names      HM PRISON, Beechworth Gaol-Cemetery,

Hermes Number   13190

Property Number

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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/>*