

# DIAMOND HOUSE



Diamond House\_Stawell\_  
Kj\_29/5/08



Diamond  
House\_Stawell\_KJ\_29/5/08



Diamond House-  
Stawell\_detail\_KJ\_29/5/08



Diamond  
House\_Stawell\_garden  
elevation\_KJ\_29/5/08



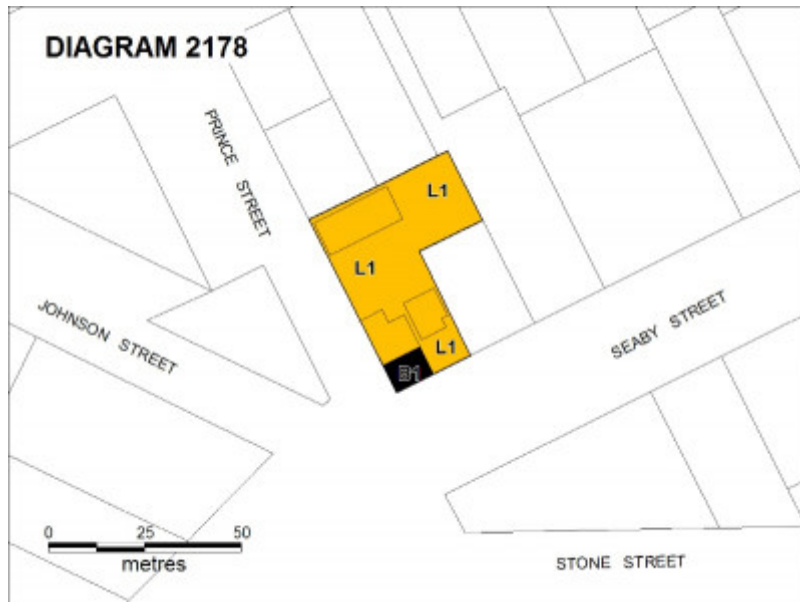
Diamond  
House\_Stawell\_interior\_KJ\_29,



Diamond House\_Stawel\_rear  
wing\_KJ\_29 May 08



Diamond  
House\_Stawell\_timber  
cottage\_Kj\_29 may 08



H2178 diamond house plan

---

## Location

24 SEABY STREET STAWELL, NORTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE

## Municipality

NORTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2178

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO31

## VHR Registration

October 9, 2008

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

---

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is significant?

Diamond House was built in c1866-8 by John Hearne, a miner who then lived in a small house next to it. The building was Hearne's residence, but he held a wine licence in 1880 and it is said that Diamond House was intended to be a wine shop. Hearne's nephew was the architect George Inskip, and it is thought that he may have been involved in the design, but he arrived in Australia only in 1870, running an architectural practice in Stawell from 1870-1884 before moving to Western Australia, and then to Melbourne in 1886. Hearne's 1889 obituary noted that he was well-known in Stawell for the construction of the house, which had long been an object of interest to visitors and had become a landmark on the Stawell Road, and that 'not a nail of any sort was used in its construction'. After Hearne's death the building was sold and has since been used as a private residence, a confectionary shop, briefly a technical school and a Seventh Day Adventist meeting hall, and since 1982 as a restaurant. The timber cottage adjacent to Diamond House was probably built in the early twentieth century, and the brick wing at the rear was built after 1983.

Diamond House is a single storey rectangular plan building built to the boundaries of the block on the corner of Seaby and Prince Streets. The walls are decorated with a diamond pattern of white and brown rubble stones, said to have been gathered from Church Hill opposite. The decoration covers all of the wall surfaces, and forms a contrasting band around the parapet, where the diamond pattern is tilted by ninety degrees, and which has bands of bricks and white quartz at the top edge. The roof is hidden behind the parapet, and is said to be flat, though it is more likely to be a skillion. The windows are elongated paired casements with herringbone pattern glazing that continues the diamond theme, and on the east side there are French windows opening to the garden. There is a single face brick chimney corbelled at the top.

How is it significant?

Diamond House is of architectural significance to the state of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Diamond House is architecturally significant as a unique building in Victoria, and demonstrates the nineteenth century English interest in vernacular building traditions and in polychromy. The use of vernacular building materials and techniques was made fashionable in the nineteenth century by the contemporary interest in the Picturesque aesthetic and by the Arts and Crafts movement. Diamond House is an early and most unusual example in Victoria of constructional polychromy, which became a concern of the most advanced English architects in the 1850s and 1860s and became a characteristic feature of much High Victorian architecture. The use of constructional polychromy at this time and for a relatively humble building, said to have been designed and built by a miner rather than by an architect, is most unusual. It is possible that the builder's nephew, the architect George Inskip, had some involvement with the design.

## 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. General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan endorsed by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: The existence of a Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan endorsed by the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria 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 may 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	1866,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	14436
Property Number	

---

## History

### CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

Vernacular construction throughout the world utilises locally available materials, especially for more humble buildings, and there has always been a close relationship between the local geology and traditional materials used in traditional English building. This was largely due to the great difficulty, and therefore the high cost involved, in transporting heavy materials. (Alex Clifton-Taylor, *The Pattern of English Building*, p 22.)

Stone was always the most prestigious and the most desirable building material, especially in the Georgian and Victorian periods. However due to the cost of cut stone, the majority of old stone buildings in England are of rubble, or irregular hunks of stone, arranged either randomly or coursed (Alex Clifton-Taylor, *The Pattern of English Building*, London 1972, pp 33, 37, 43). However more decorative forms of rubble construction have also developed, with the stones, sometimes of contrasting colours, arranged to form intricate patterns. Around Brighton, Shoreham and Worthing the stones were coated with tar and the brick dressings were lime washed, resulting in a reversal of the black and white scheme of half-timbering. In Kent black and white stripes were popular, or stripes of light flint and red brick. In Wiltshire large diamonds of red brick were inserted into flint walls.

A combination of flints and squares of ashlar limestone to give a chequerboard effect became a popular device in most flint area. In the fifteenth century guildhall of Norwich the black and white squares are arranged diagonally. (Clifton-Taylor, pp 203-5)

According to the Fleming et al *Dictionary of Architecture* (1966) a taste for vernacular building

formed a part of the Picturesque from the late eighteenth century (eg the cottage orne), they were generally scorned until the mid to late nineteenth century, when professional architects associated with [William] Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement drew inspiration from them in their search for a way out of historicism while preserving contact with national or local history and traditions.

R W Brunskill (*Illustrated Handbook of Vernacular Architecture*, London 1978, p 42) comments that pebbled walls were used as an affectation giving character to a cottage orne. J C Loudon (*Encyclopedia of Cottage farm and Villa Architecture and Furniture*, London 1846, section 330) comments that 'as a general principle, it may be affirmed that the materials of the walls of a cottage ought always to be such as are, or may be, furnished by the soil or vicinity where it is placed'. He includes several designs (eg pp 1132, 1164, 1195) for buildings of rubble, including a model cottage, a small Gothic villa and a dairy lodge 'with walls and brick and flints in chequered courses'. This interest in traditional patterning was encouraged by the Victorian passion for polychromy.

Due to the high cost of transportation in Victoria during the nineteenth century buildings were made of locally available materials where possible. These included adzed or pit-sawn slabs, pise and wattle and daub, as well as local stone, such as stone rubble and the Western District bluestone. Lady Jane Franklin noted in 1837 a new house north of Melbourne of stones 'picked up nearby' (noted in Lewis, 'Earth and stone: Stone', in *Australian Building*, p 3.07.2, online printed 2007.) Lewis also notes that James Orr's Stratford Lodge (VHR H318) at Metcalfe is a rubble granite building claimed to date from 1848.

Constructional polychromy developed in England in the 1850s as a result of the writings of Ruskin and his admiration of the medieval architecture of Northern Italy, and also of Pugin's concerns that building materials not be concealed. It became the main concern of the most advanced architects in England in the 1850s and 1860s, and became a 'kind of trademark' of Victorian period architecture. (Dixon & Muthesius, *Victorian Architecture*, p 22.)

George Inskip

George C Inskip was educated in Brighton, England and in Hanover, Germany. He served his articles in London with Tress & Chambers, during which time he paid many visits to the Continent to complete his studies. He emigrated and arrived in Stawell in 1870, where he had some relatives and where he established an architectural practice.

In 1884 and 1886 he visited Western Australia where he designed Union Bank buildings in Perth, Fremantle, Albany, Geraldton and Roeburne, the head office of the West Australian bank in Perth, and was appointed to superintend the construction of the Perth Cathedral.

In Victoria he designed a large number of important buildings, including approximately thirty bank buildings, numerous business premises, warehouses and churches. A notable design in Stawell was the Mechanics Institute in Main Street. Inskip was a notable architect in Victoria; he was a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects and of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects, and was RVIA President 1890-92. He was in partnership with W E Robertson from 1888, practising as Inskip & Robertson, and from 1889-93 with Walter Butler, as Inskip & Butler.

## HISTORY OF PLACE

It is thought that the Diamond House was begun by John Hearne in 1866 and completed two years later. An article in the *Stawell News* of 17 January 1934 quotes the artist Will J Rees who claims to have remembered the construction of the house, and remembered that it was completed by the time he was in the third class at the Common School in 1868. It aroused considerable local comment due to its unusual architecture.

On 6 January 1868 the ownership of the block of land now at 24 Seaby Street was transferred from George Jennings to Mrs Lucy Hearne, the wife of John Hearne. The 55 year old John Hearne and his wife then lived in a small skillion house on the block (possibly the one which appears in an early photograph shown on the interpretation board at the front), and he is said to have had interests in some of the mining claims at the foot of

Big Hill in Stawell.

The 1868 rate book lists John Hearne and William Inskip, both described as miners, as owning the dwelling and land in Pleasant Creek (Stawell) with the value of ?25. The following year the rateable value is given as ?35, suggesting that the house was completed by then. In the National Trust file there is a letter dated 7 September 1960 from a Leslie Sutherland who stated that he was born in 1881 and that the building 'had been up many years then'.

The rate book of 1871 indicates that Hearne, still a miner, owned the dwelling and William Inskip (whose relationship to George Inskip is unknown, but possibly his father), now listed as a mine owner, owned the land. The 1871 rate book also lists the architect George C Inskip, Hearne's nephew, for the first time, as the owner of a dwelling next door.

George Inskip's name has been linked to the construction of Diamond House, but he arrived in Australia in 1870, after the building is thought to have been completed, and lived in Stawell from then until 1884. However it seems unlikely that he had no input into the design.

John Hearne held a wine licence by 1880, and it is said that the Diamond House was, when constructed, intended for a wine shop. Hearne died on 25 March 1889 and his obituary in the *Stawell News* described him as follows:

The deceased, who was well respected as an honest upright man, was specially known in reference to the peculiarity in the building of his residence, "Diamond House", which took him two years to construct, not a nail of any sort being used in its erection. The house (which has become almost as a landmark in Stawell-road) was particularly comfortable, cool in summer, and warm in winter, and has long been an object of interest to visitors. The deceased also made some curious garden seats, some of them having been obtained for the Ballarat Botanical gardens. Altogether, in fact, he was very ingenious, although, we regret to say, not in very affluent circumstances. He was uncle to Mr G C Inskip, architect, and leaves a widow and grown-up family.

Hearne was not a wealthy man, and the house would have been an economical one to build, with a simple cubic form, using materials gathered around the site and not even nails being purchased.

In December 1893 part of the property was transferred from Mrs Hearne to a Clement Dowling, and the proprietor of the balance was George Inskip (then living in St Kilda). Following the death of Hearne's wife in 1895, Inskip's portion was also transferred to Dowling. The Diamond House has since had many owners and tenants.

The house has long been an object of interest to locals and visitors. The *Weekly Times* of 18 April 1902 published a photograph and stated that it was then a private residence. It has been a confectionary shop, briefly a technical school and a Seventh Day Adventist Hall. In 1982 it became part of the Diamond House restaurant, and now motel. A brick addition was made at the rear in the late twentieth century, and a cottage set further back on the block has replaced the original cottage adjacent to Diamond House.

## REFERENCES

Data sheet for Diamond House in Shire of Northern Grampians - Stage 2 Heritage Study 2004 (which makes reference to National Trust File B45).

## Assessment Against Criteria

- a. *The historical importance, association with or relationship to Victoria's history of the place or object*
- b. *The importance of a place or object in demonstrating rarity or uniqueness*

Diamond House is a unique building in Victoria, and reflects the nineteenth century English interest in vernacular building traditions and in polychromy. The use of vernacular building materials and techniques was made fashionable in the nineteenth century by the contemporary interest in the Picturesque aesthetic and by the Arts and Crafts movement. Diamond House is an early and most unusual example in Victoria of constructional polychromy, which became a concern of the most advanced English architects in the 1850s and 1860s and became a characteristic feature of much High Victorian architecture. The use of constructional polychromy at this

time and for a relatively humble building, said to have been designed and built by a miner rather than by an architect, is most unusual. It is possible that the builder's nephew, the architect George Inskip, had some involvement with the design.

- c. The place or object's potential to educate, illustrate or provide further scientific investigation in relation to Victoria's cultural heritage
- d. The importance of a place or object in exhibiting the principal characteristics or the representative nature of a place or object as part of a class or type of places or objects
- e. The importance of the place or object in exhibiting good design or aesthetic characteristics and/or in exhibiting a richness, diversity or unusual integration of features
- f. The importance of the place or object in demonstrating or being associated with scientific or technical innovations or achievements
- g. The importance of the place or object in demonstrating social or cultural associations
- h. Any other matter which the Council deems relevant to the determination of cultural heritage significance

## **Plaque Citation**

Built c1866-8 by the miner John Hearne, possibly influenced by his nephew, the architect George Inskip, Diamond House is an unusual example of polychrome construction and of English vernacular building techniques.

## **Extent of Registration**

1. All of the land marked L1 on Diagram 2178 held by the Executive Director, being all of the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 09638 Folio 844.
2. All of the building marked B1 on Diagram 2178 held by the Executive Director.

---

*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/>*