

PELLA ST JOHNS LUTHERAN CHURCH COMPLEX



Pella St John's School building and church



Southern elevation of church (front entrance)



Southeast elevation of church



Northern elevation of church (rear entrance)



Western elevation of the church



Pulpit with cloth



Altar with baptismal font in the foreground



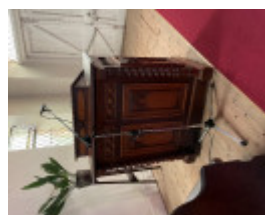
Baptismal font



Organ located at the southern end of the church



April 2023, Interior view from the south to the north of the church



March 2023, Lectern



April 2023, Eastern elevation of school building



April 2023, School building interior view from north to south



April 2023, Western elevation of the manse



April 2023, North verandah looking east



Aerial extent labelled



1910, St John's Pella under construction



14 May 1911, Procession at the dedication of the Pella Church



14 May 1911, Chancel at Pella Church, also showing the baptismal font and pews



c.1917, Pella Church and School



c.1917, Chancel at Pella Church

DIAGRAM 2444

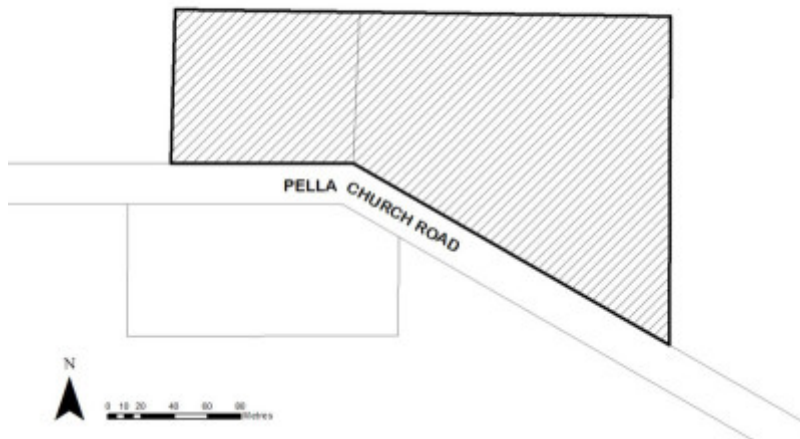


image027

Location

220 PELLA CHURCH ROAD RAINBOW, HINDMARSH SHIRE

Municipality

HINDMARSH SHIRE

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2444

VHR Registration

June 13, 2024

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 19, 2024

What is significant?

The Pella St Johns Lutheran Church Complex being the school building (1903) and original school desk, the manse (1909) and church (1911) built of limestone by the congregation, and the following objects integral:

1. Timber pulpit
2. Hymn board, letters, numbers and wooden box
3. Timber baptismal font and glass bowl
4. Timber altar and candleholders
5. Timber lectern
6. 27 church pews
7. The Fuller organ (1885), bench, organ case and all mechanical and decorative elements
8. Original school desk.

How is it significant?

The Pella St Johns Lutheran Church Complex is of historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

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.

Why is it significant?

The Pella St Johns Lutheran Church Complex is historically significant for its demonstration of German migration to northwest Victoria. From the 1870s, successive waves of German migrants from western Victoria and South Australia established a strong farming presence in the Wimmera, and from the 1880s and 90s settlements extended into the southern Mallee. Closeknit multigenerational communities developed in which German language and culture was proudly maintained. The Pella Church Complex, once the centre of a thriving rural German settlement with a resident pastor from 1912, speaks to the commitment of migrants to build and sustain a strong community around the Lutheran faith, values and identity in the Wimmera-Mallee region. (Criterion A)

The Pella St Johns Church Complex is architecturally significant as a fine complex of Lutheran church buildings which demonstrate a simple Gothic revival style and the use of natural materials (principally limestone and timber), key elements in the Lutheran design tradition. Constructed in a rustic style by men from the congregation using vernacular building techniques, the school, manse and church all demonstrate high levels of intactness. A visually cohesive complex, the place retains its setting in a flat expansive area of Wimmera-Mallee farmland, and original church furnishings are still located at the place, including the timber baptismal font and altar, which were handmade by a community member, and a Fuller organ (1886) which is a fine example of the work the prominent Melbourne organ builder Alfred Fuller. (Criterion D)

Permit Exemptions

Specific Permit Exemptions

The works and activities below are not considered to cause harm to the cultural heritage significance of the Pella St Johns Lutheran Church Complex subject to the guidelines and conditions which follow:

Water tanks, toilet block, corrugated iron shed (all built after 2000)

- Exterior maintenance and repair
- All interior works
- Removal

Pipe Organ

- The reeds of the organ may be tuned by the Church Organist or by an organ builder who has experience in the type of work to be undertaken. When tuning, the original pitch, temperament and voicing (if still in original form) should not be altered.
- Maintenance also includes playing through every note on every register (i.e. a stop or rank of pipes) at frequent time intervals if the organ is seldom used, in order to prevent the settling of dust and dirt in pipes and other parts vital to wind conduction.
- The repair of minor faults and defects by an organ builder who has experience in the type of work to be undertaken if discovered during tuning or cleaning and dust removal. The repairs must maximise protection and retention of existing fabric.
- Electrical repairs to the modern electric blower.

Specific Permit Exemption Guidelines

1. Where there is an inconsistency between permit exemptions specific to the registered place or object ('specific exemptions') established in accordance with either section 49(3) or section 92(3) of the Heritage Act 2017(the Act) and general exemptions established in accordance with section 92(1) of the Act specific exemptions will prevail to the extent of any inconsistency.

2. In specific exemptions, words have the same meaning as in the Act, unless otherwise indicated. Where there is an inconsistency between specific exemptions and the Act, the Act will prevail to the extent of any inconsistency.
3. Nothing in specific exemptions obviates the responsibility of a proponent to obtain the consent of the owner of the registered place or object, or if the registered place or object is situated on Crown Land the land manager as defined in the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978, prior to undertaking works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions.
4. If a Cultural Heritage Management Plan in accordance with the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 is required for works covered by specific exemptions, specific exemptions will apply only if the Cultural Heritage Management Plan has been approved prior to works or activities commencing. Where there is an inconsistency between specific exemptions and a Cultural Heritage Management Plan for the relevant works and activities, Heritage Victoria must be contacted for advice on the appropriate approval pathway.
5. Specific exemptions do not constitute approvals, authorisations or exemptions under any other legislation, Local Government, State Government or Commonwealth Government requirements, including but not limited to the Planning and Environment Act 1987, the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006, and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth). Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to obtain relevant planning, building or environmental approvals from the responsible authority where applicable.
6. Care should be taken when working with heritage buildings and objects, as historic fabric may contain dangerous and poisonous materials (for example lead paint and asbestos). Appropriate personal protective equipment should be worn at all times. If you are unsure, seek advice from a qualified heritage architect, heritage consultant or local Council heritage advisor.
7. The presence of unsafe materials (for example asbestos, lead paint etc) at a registered place or object does not automatically exempt remedial works or activities in accordance with this category. Approvals under Part 5 of the Act must be obtained to undertake works or activities that are not expressly exempted by the below specific exemptions.
8. All works should be informed by a Conservation Management Plan prepared for the place or object. The Executive Director is not bound by any Conservation Management Plan, and permits still must be obtained for works suggested in any Conservation Management Plan.

Specific Permit Exemption Conditions

1. All works or activities permitted under specific exemptions must be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents harm to the registered place or object. Harm includes moving, removing or damaging any part of the registered place or object that contributes to its cultural heritage significance.
2. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the registered place are revealed relating to its cultural heritage significance, including but not limited to historical archaeological remains, such as features, deposits or artefacts, then works must cease and Heritage Victoria notified as soon as possible.
3. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any Aboriginal cultural heritage is discovered or exposed at any time, all works must cease and the Secretary (as defined in the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006) must be contacted immediately to ascertain requirements under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 .
4. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any munitions or other potentially explosive artefacts are discovered, Victoria Police is to be immediately alerted and the site is to be immediately cleared of all personnel.
5. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any suspected human remains are found the works or activities must cease. The remains must be left in place and protected from harm or damage. Victoria Police and the State Coroner's Office must be notified immediately. If there are reasonable grounds to believe that the remains are Aboriginal, the State Emergency Control Centre must be immediately notified on 1300 888 544, and, as required under s.17(3)(b) of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006, all details about the location and nature of the human remains must be provided to the Secretary (as defined in the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006).

Theme

2. Peopling Victoria's places and landscapes

Architect/Designer	JB Barnes, Nhill,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place, Registered object integral to a registered place,
Other Names	ST JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH PELLA, ST JOHNS PELLA, GERMAN LUTHERAN CHURCH, PELLA, PELLA LUTHERAN CHURCH, PELLA ST JOHNS LUTHERAN CHURCH, PELLA CHURCH,
Hermes Number	209523
Property Number	

History

Wotjobaluk Country

The Pella Church is located in northwest Victoria, approximately 92 km from the South Australian border. This region is the Country of the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia, and Jupagulk peoples, (together known as the Wotjobaluk Peoples). Aboriginal people have been living in the Wimmera for at least 40,000 years in interconnected local groups, each of which was associated with a particular area of Country. Interaction between local groups was common and facilitated social connections and access to resources. The taking of lands by pastoralists brought rapid and devastating changes to the Wotjobaluk Peoples. Many were forced to seek refuge at comparatively 'friendly' pastoral runs or Missions, such as Ebenezer Mission Station, where cultural practices were discouraged. Today, the Wotjobaluk peoples maintain a strong and enduring connection to Country and culture, represented by the Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

German Lutheran migration to Victoria

During the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, German-speaking immigrants constituted the largest non-Anglo-Celtic group in Australia. Germans first arrived in Melbourne in the late 1830s and by 1851 there were around 800. These migrants were mostly Lutherans from Prussia and Saxony. They settled in central Melbourne and nearby suburbs, particularly Collingwood, Richmond and Hawthorn, as well as further afield in Westgarthtown, known also as Neu-Mecklenburg (now Thomastown), Waldau (now Doncaster), and Germantown (now Grovedale) near Geelong.

During the 1850s, there was a wave of German migration to the Western District of Victoria from South Australia. Several settlements were established around Hamilton such as Hochkirch (now Tarrington) and Gnadental near Penshurst. From the 1870s, German migration continued into the Wimmera region, from South Australia and western Victoria, in part due to land opening up for selection. Families settled around Horsham, Natimuk, Dimboola and Murtoa.

German settlers made a significant contribution to the development of the wheat industry in north west Victoria, employing European agricultural methods. They brought with them vernacular building traditions, including earth-based and stone building methods, and thatching, which were simple, and cost effective techniques suitable for remote regions. German migrants typically settled in family groups and maintained a degree of cultural identity, the German language being used in Lutheran schools and churches. They were generally regarded as good farmers and their success was sometimes attributed to their thrift and industriousness.

In the 1880s and 90s German settlers moved into the northern Wimmera and southern Mallee, around Beulah, Nhill, Jeparit, Rainbow and Outlet Creek. By 1895 there was a sufficient number of German Lutherans living in Rainbow to form a congregation. The settlement of Outlet Creek, further west of Rainbow, was also growing. Outlet Creek connects Lake Hindmarsh and Lake Albacutya, and German settlers in the area were branches of families which had established themselves in other areas of Victoria or South Australia, seeking more farming

land and a place to raise children. In the early 1900s the Outlet Creek community commenced building its own church buildings.

The Outlet Creek (Pella) congregation

The school (1903)

In 1902, the Outlet Creek community resolved to construct its own Lutheran School. Prioritised as the first building, it demonstrates the importance of schools, which were considered by German Lutheran congregations to be the 'nurseries of the church'. The school also doubled as a church until the main church was completed in 1911. Work on the school began at the end of August 1903, and the Lutheran community constructed the limestone building in around two months. It was opened on 8 November 1903. Each morning Bible history and religion were taught in German, then academic classes followed. On Sundays when the pastor from Hopetoun did not visit, lay readers read church services in the school building.

The manse (1909)

In 1909, there were more Lutherans living in Outlet Creek than Rainbow and the church communities resolved the Outlet Creek community could independently build a new church, and that the pastor for the area should reside there. It was during this 1909 meeting that the name 'Pella' was recorded in the minutes as the name of the new church. According to early Christian texts, Pella (located in present-day Jordan) was a place of refuge for Christians fleeing from the Romans in 70AD when Jerusalem was destroyed. The formal name adopted for the Outlet Creek congregation was 'The Evangelical Lutheran St Johns at Pella'. In March 1909, the Pella Manse was completed and became the new home of the pastor from Hopetoun.

The church (1911)

Planning for the Pella Church then commenced in earnest. Mr Barnes, an architect from Nhill was engaged and called for tenders. Given the expense of the endeavour, to be paid for by a loan by the congregation, there was a strong view the construction labour should be provided by the community. Bell and Kormann were the contractors, and Lutheran men laboured under supervision during working bees. The foreman was a parishioner, Johann Gustav 'Gus' Stasinowsky, a farmer and stonemason, whose family operated the nearby Stasinowsky's Lime Kiln (VHR H1959).

Construction of the church began in the latter half of 1910. Local limestone was transported in horse-drawn drays and wagons from a twenty acre quarry half a mile (0.8kms) from the building site. It was rough-hewn into rectangular blocks. A lime kiln was built in the church yard to create quicklime for mortar. For scaffolding, long, rough pine poles from nearby trees were used. On 8 September 1910 the foundation stone was laid, and work continued. The timber elements in the church were made by a community member who was a carpenter, Mr Austel, including the altar, forms and doors. The interior of the church emphasised white, at the wish of the Pastor, to signify purity.

At the time of its dedication on 14 May 1911, it was one of the largest Lutheran churches in Victoria. The order of service was printed in German and the service was conducted in German. A gendered seating arrangement was decided: men would occupy the left-hand pews, women the right-hand pews, and families with children the central pews. One of the features of the Pella church is its dual entry doors. It is unclear whether this follows the practice of some early churches to have separate doors for men and women or relates to other aspects of church life.

Lutheran church design

The Pella church demonstrates some central principles of Lutheran ecclesiastical design. Church buildings have traditionally been constructed of natural building materials, such as wood, stones and bricks, to symbolise God's creations. Church interiors are simple and unadorned so that the congregation may focus on worship. Exteriors typically reflect the Gothic style, embodying long vertical lines and many windows. The use of natural light is a central design element in Lutheran churches, as natural light spilling in from clear-glass and stained windows is used to symbolise God's presence.

German church culture

Early church services (preaching services) at Pella were conducted by the pastor wholly in German. On Sundays when the pastor was ministering to other congregations, a German reading service was led by Pella parishioners. Some English language elements were introduced during the 1910s. Ian Maroske, historian of Pella, notes that the first three generations of Lutherans in Australia tended to 'keep somewhat aloof' from their wider communities, and mixed marriages were a source of concern. As a result of this separatism, there was some antagonism towards people with a German background, although this was moderated by the respect that British-Australians had built up for their neighbours over many years.

World War I (1914-18)

After the declaration of war in early August 1914, all 'Germans' living in Australia were called upon to report to the nearest police station. It was then up to the local police officers to impose any restrictions they may have thought fit. By the end of 1914, military authorities were given the power to intern 'enemy subjects with whose conduct they were not satisfied'. Since it was physically impossible for the Australian authorities to detain all German-Australians, the government decided early on to pursue a policy of selective internment. Oral accounts from members of the current Pella Church congregation suggest that members of this particular community were not interned. But there were some 'German baiters' in the Rainbow district who initiated hostile encounters with parishioners.

Lutherans at Pella publicly declared their position three weeks after war was declared, holding a patriotic concert and meeting in Rainbow. A resolution of loyalty was also passed by the Pella congregation after a church service. A central tenant of Lutheran theology was *Zwei-Reich-Lehre* (that is, the doctrine of the two kingdoms, spiritual and temporal) which called for loyalty to the state and respect for the secular authorities. Second and third generation pastors and their congregations were subjects of the British Crown and citizens of their respective Australian colonies, and of the Commonwealth after 1901. Established pastors were conscious of their identity as representatives of an Australian, not a German, church. Relations with Germany were of a purely private nature, concerning the maintenance of language, family ties and cultural traditions.

Despite this, strong waves of anti-German sentiments were evident across Australia, and Lutheran churches were high profile public targets. Place names of German origin were changed, such as Germantown/Grovedale, Hochkirch/Tarrington and Mount Bismarck/Mount Kitchener. Arsonists burned down Lutheran churches at nearby Murtoa in 1915 and 16, and at Netherby in 1916. Attempts were also made to burn down the Lutheran church at Jeparit (1916 and 1918). All Lutheran schools were closed during the war, as were all German clubs and German-language newspapers. The Lutheran school at Pella ceased teaching in German in 1916, after protracted negotiations with the Minister of Education.

After the war, German communities were engaged in a process of rebuilding their identities. At Pella it was agreed to have alternate English and German reading services in April 1922. In July 1924 the pastor gained approval from the quarterly conference of the Pella Church for the purchase of an English Bible for the altar. In 1926 all German reading services were ceased. In 1932 German and English preaching services were held on alternate Sundays. Throughout the 1920s and 30s the school was at capacity, and the resident pastor moved to Rainbow, and the school teacher moved into the manse.

World War II (1939-45)

During World War II, there was further anti-German sentiment. In 1940, Lutheran churches were burned down at Willaura and Hopetoun. It was difficult to attract a teacher to Pella, student numbers dwindled, and the school closed in 1943. In following decades, only a small number of afternoon services were conducted in German annually. This was a gesture to the older generation, many of whom believed that Lutheran worship was more pleasing to God if delivered in German, however it signalled the end of an era.

The organ

The first organ at Pella was purchased in 1906 and was at first used in the school building. In the early 1920s, a Mason and Hamlin organ, was installed in the church. A Bell organ was purchased around 1939. In 1970 a Fuller organ (1885) was purchased by the Pella congregation and installed in the church. It is a fine example of the work of the prominent Melbourne organ builder Alfred Fuller. The instrument retains its attractive painted case, with diapered facade pipes, pipework, tonal scheme, mechanical action and console fittings and is one of the few surviving examples of its builder's work which has not sustained substantial alterations.

The present day

In 2023 the school building houses a collection of old books and photos, along with two early school desks, one of which is original to the school. Services are still conducted weekly at St Johns and the manse is now used for Sunday School lessons. Many descendants of the early settlers still live in the Pella area. The surnames of these families, such as Heinrich, Drendel, Keller, Eckermann, Schilling, Keller, Stasinowsky, Krelle and Nuske, are evidence of the origins of their forebears.

Selected bibliography

Ian Maroske, *The story of Pella*, Pella District Historical Society, 1975.
Pella, [German-Australia website](#), Accessed May 2023.
Grieve Gillett, *Horsham Heritage Study (Stage 2)*, Vol 3, August 2014.
Barengi Gadjin Land Council, *Growing What is Good: Country Plan*, October 2017.

Consultation and interviews

The Executive Director acknowledges the assistance of the people associated with the preparation of this nomination:

- Pastor Lucas Matuschka
- Mr Mal Drendel
- Mr Dave Stasinowsky

Extent of Registration

Heritage Act 2017

NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the Heritage Act 2017, I give notice under section 53 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including a place in the Heritage Register: Number: H2444

Category: Registered Place, Objects Integral to a Registered Place

Place: Pella St Johns Lutheran Church Complex

Location: 220 Pella Church Road, Rainbow

Municipality: Hindmarsh Shire

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 2444 encompassing all of Crown Allotment 1A and 1B Parish of Pigick, and all the registered objects integral to the place being:

1. timber pulpit;
2. hymn board, letters, numbers and wooden box;
3. timber baptismal font and glass bowl;
4. timber altar and candleholders;
5. timber lectern;
6. 27 church pews;
7. the Fuller organ (1885), bench, organ case and all mechanical and decorative elements;
8. original school desk.

Dated 13 June 2024

STEVEN AVERY

Executive Director

Government Gazette G24 13 June 2024

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/>