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# PORTLAND COURT HOUSE



PORTLAND COURT HOUSE  
SOHE 2008



1 portland court house cliff  
street portland front view  
may1984

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## Location

67 CLIFF STREET PORTLAND, GLENELG SHIRE

## Municipality

GLENELG SHIRE

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1481

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO40

## VHR Registration

August 20, 1982

## Amendment to Registration

May 23, 1998

## Heritage Listing

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 27, 1999

What is significant?

Portland Court House is a single-storey bluestone court house erected in 1843-45 to a design attributed to the Port Phillip District's clerk of works, James Rattenbury (1808-63). The building exhibits the simplicity and elegance of the Victorian Regency style, with classical elements including a symmetrical facade, prostyle portico supported by four Doric columns, a classical pediment, sash windows with multi-panelled glazing, multi-panelled doors, and smooth-textured ashlar masonry walls. Detailing in the bluestone exterior of the east elevation facade presents a restrained and unified display of skill and simplicity. Apart from the addition of a magistrate's washroom at the rear in 1953, the floor plan is generally intact. Through the main entrance on the east elevation is a large central courtroom surrounded by rooms for a magistrate, jury, clerks, a library, a cell, and sheriff's office. Light enters the courtroom from four directions. Some original furniture and fittings have been removed, but the courtroom retains much of its original joinery and is the most complete and impressive space in the building. An original slate roof has been replaced by terra cotta tiles, the porch filled, and a public toilet block has been built near the site. The building has been continuously used as a court house since its inception and is a key element of the predominantly bluestone civic and judicial precinct at Portland.

How is it significant?

Portland Court House is of historical, architectural and cultural significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Portland Court House is historically significant as the earliest surviving court house in Victoria and as the oldest court house in Victoria still operating. It is a significant feature of the early government quarter in Victoria's oldest settlement, where it is associated with other buildings in a major bluestone precinct which includes the Customs House (1849), Police Watch House (1850), and former Town Hall (1860). It is a physical reminder of the arrival of permanent British justice in Victoria's earliest settlement. Portland Court House is historically important for its rarity as an extant building attributed to Port Phillip's first clerk of works (James Rattenbury). From its overall integrity and construction date of 1843-45, Portland Court House is also historically important for its direct association with Victoria's legal process over more than 150 years, and as a rare, surviving example of a Victorian Government building built before the establishment of the Public Works Department in 1856.

Portland Court House is architecturally important as the earlier of two surviving court houses in Victoria designed in the Victorian Regency style, which was popular in the 1840s and 1850s and notable for its elegance, simplicity, and sparse classical details, often involving stone construction, clear rectangular masses, classical columns, and roofs concealed by parapets. It is also significant as one of the few buildings outside NSW or Tasmania that demonstrates Victorian Regency architecture.

## 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](#).

Construction dates	1853,
Architect/Designer	Ginn, Henry,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	941
Property Number	

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## Extent of Registration

Amendment of Register of Government Buildings  
Portland Town  
Court House, Cliff Street, Portland.  
[*Victoria Government Gazette* No. G39 12 October 1988 p.3092]

Transferred to the Victorian Heritage Register 23 May 1998 (2 years after the proclamation of the Heritage Act 1995 pursuant to the transitional provisions of the Act)

*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/>*