

Victorian Heritage Database Report

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Lydiard St Heritage Precinct



LYDIARD STREET HERITAGE PRECINCT

Municipality

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO171

Heritage Listing

Ballarat City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

The Lydiard Street Heritage Precinct is **architecturally and aesthetically** significant at a **STATE** level (AHC criteria D.2, E.1 and F).

(d) the place's importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of: (i) a class of Australia's natural or cultural places; or (ii) a class of Australia's natural or cultural environments; (e) the place's importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group;

(f) the place's importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

The Precinct is aesthetically and architecturally significant as an outstanding example of 19th century provincial city centre representing the development of modern urbanism, initiated by the 1850s gold rush in rural Victoria. As a model of a mid 19th century classical European city it is an excellent testament of European colony planning where urban design and perspective views were adapted to the local context and can be appreciated in all its magnitude. The natural physical framework along with the built is used as a theatrical backdrop with rectilinear streets lined by buildings of similar neo-classical facades and similar heights that define the sociopolitical functions and cultural centre of Ballarat.

The historic urban development and character of the Precinct is architecturally important to Ballarat, as the first large goldfields town surveyed by W.S. Urquhart, which is regarded as his most successful in Victoria. The primary focus of the British Colonial Office was the design and layout of streets as well as provision of law and order on the goldfields, with local private capital generated by the gold fields financing the buildings.

The Precinct is aesthetically and architecturally significant as an excellent model representing 19th century neo-classical town planning based on a new order, hygiene and services that sharply distinguishes it from East Ballarat. The absolute regularity of the grid street pattern gives way dramatically in the east to a basalt escarpment, which overlooks the former chaotic gold mining area along Yarrowee Creek and East Ballarat. The juxtaposition between order and chaos is further reinforced by the street names which were all named after Police Commissioners and Officers of the Native Police controlling the goldfields and comprise the following, Sturt (Commandant of the Melbourne City Police), Lydiard (Officer Lydiard of the Native Police from Goulburn area, later full Commissioner), Dana (Captain Dana of the Native Police), Mair (Melbourne Police Magistrate and Inspector of Police), Doveton (Commissioner Doveton), Armstrong (Assistant to Commissioner Doveton).

The creation of the Precinct between 1850 and 1880s is particularly significant as it coincided with the early boom of the gold fields and because the legacy of mid 19th century historic street pattern, urban fabric and buildings have retained their authenticity and integrity to a high degree, in terms of the historic architecture and types of function. The historic area is one of a few examples of this type in Australia where the early collection of grand buildings and infrastructure are well protected and well managed. Although the Precinct has been subject to urban growth which still continues, the urban fabric has been extended on the same pattern as the first plan and the historic core has not been subject to drastic transformations.

Ballarat architecture in Lydiard and Sturt Streets represented its *éclat*, its style. The architecture best symbolized the *belle époque* of the gold mining boom, it was initiated by the wealth generated from the alluvial and deep leads and sustained by the growth of quartz gold mining from the late 1850s. This was emphasized by major landmark buildings that defined the focal point of the major intersections of the grids.

The economic success of the town allowed for the development of a city that responded to the social aspirations of a rising middle class and serviced the needs of the mining industry. The success of a unifying aesthetic ideal derived from overseas 19th century and early 20th century architectural and planning ideas adapted to a provincial Australian model is evidenced by the remarkable collection of landmark neo-classical building styles in the precinct which collectively contribute to a visually unified streetscape of great classical beauty.

The early construction of opulent buildings in Lydiard Street was due to the specific characteristics of the Ballarat gold fields. It was the discovery of gold at Ballarat in 1851 that resulted in Victoria's gold boom. Ballarat was recognized as probably the richest alluvial goldfields in the world at its peak between 1852 and 53. Unlike the great alluvial goldfield at Mt Alexander, Castlemaine, Ballarat was a unique field. It had both surface alluvial, deep lead and quartz mining that led to a more permanent stable population than most other mining areas, where the rise of syndicates and companies became common. It also led to increased tension between government authorities and miners which after the Eureka Rebellion in 1854, provided for the development of new courts of mines and mining legislation that underpins mining activities throughout Australia today. It also paved the way for rapid and orderly growth of capitalist mining and accumulation of vast wealth.

The Precinct is also architecturally and historically significant for its associational links with the development of mining law related to underground mining practices. The many disputed claims in the area gave rise to a substantial growth in legal chambers and fine architectural buildings that lined Lydiard Street by 1860s. A gaol (1857) and Supreme Court (1868) were built in Lydiard Street South and the area became the centre of legal and business offices and many buildings still house these functions today. A Church Precinct at the corner of Lydiard and Dana Streets contributed to the importance of this area of Lydiard Street and creates a spectacular backdrop to the centre city.

The Precinct is also architecturally and historically significant for its group of six outstanding neo-classical banks in Lydiard Street designed by notable Melbourne architect Leonard Terry in the 1860s, clustered around the

corner of Lydiard and Sturt Streets. These include from the northern corner the former Bank of Australasia, the National Bank, former Colonial Bank of Australasia and the Bank of New South Wales which were all built in a row. On the southern corner, the London Chartered Bank and the nearby Union Bank buildings continued the theme. It is also the site of the Mining Exchange (1887-89) which replaced an earlier exchange located near the south-west corner of Sturt and Lydiard Streets. The earlier exchange building (now the library of the Ballarat Mechanic's Institute) had been the scene for broker's offices, major transactions, and where the disclosure of important gold discoveries were made.

In the early 1860s the Government Camp (the site of the former Gold Commissioners Police Camp in Camp Street) was subdivided and other uses were located there. These include, the Market Reserve, Ballarat Free Library and Reading Rooms Reserve and Benevolent Asylum Reserve. Between 1891 and 1925 these Reserves were redeveloped along Sturt and Camp Streets with shops dating 1895 - 1901 on the corner of the streets, and a Library (1895- 1901). However the former function of area was reinstated when the Police Court (1903-4) and new State Government Offices and Courthouse were erected in Camp Street in 1941. The Chief Government Architect, Percy Everett, designed a building which became a "*dramatic new element in the street.*" The Police Station (1961) was the only new building built in the Camp Street area in the post World War II period.

Further subdivision of the Government Camp site in the mid to late 1880s was followed by the construction of five boom-style buildings including the Ballarat Commercial Club (later the Alexandra Tearooms, 26-34 Lydiard Street), Bones Building, the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, Old Colonists' Hall and the Mining Exchange, all with frontages along Lydiard Street. These buildings along with the Post Office (begun 1864) on the corner of Sturt and Lydiard Streets and the Victorian buildings on the west side of Lydiard Street, formed a distinctive 'boom style' streetscape. Imposing buildings such as the Chamber of Commerce (1859), the Ballarat Mechanic's institute (commenced 1860) and Post Office (commenced 1864) were early additions to Sturt Street. By the 1870s timber shops had been replaced by brick shops. By the 1860s the boulevard character of Sturt Street was being defined with the development of a dual carriageway.

Around 1862, the northern end of Lydiard Street became the focus of a specific type of buildings which addressed the needs of the new railway station and the grand neoclassical styled Railway Hall. Two two-storey bluestone warehouses were built on the corner sites for Lister and Angel and McDowall and Gray close to the railway and at the north end of Lydiard Street other warehouses concentrated with premises such as Holmes, White & Co and merchant Robert Dunn both built in 1862. Hotels already established in the area included the George in 1852 and William Irwin's Provincial Hotel in 1863, later relocated and rebuilt nearby others include the Alexandra Tea Rooms and Reid's Coffee Palace. The Craig's Hotel was established in 1852 in Lydiard Street South. Between 1865 and 1890 the sites were developed into a "*series of distinctive two-storey commercial and civic buildings.*"

The Precinct is architecturally significant for the outstanding collection of 19th century civic and commercial buildings associated with the commercial life of Ballarat. These include, the City of Ballarat Town Hall, the Myer Building and the Golden City Hotel in Sturt Street, the William Booth Citadel in Albert Street, South British Insurance Company on the corner of Dana and Armstrong Streets, The Ballarat Club, the former Ballarat Brewery building in Dana Street, Electra Hall, the Trades Hall and the YMCA building in Camp Street, The former Gas Company building, Ballarat Water Board Office, Manchester Unity Hall and Protestant Hall in Grenville Street. A late development to the Lydiard Street and Sturt Street corner was the 1905 National Mutual Building designed by J.J. and E.J. Clarke Architects of Melbourne. The most notable buildings in the block between Sturt and Dana Street are Her Majesty's Theatre, which is the oldest operating theatre in mainland Australia and Craig's Royal Hotel. The office buildings in this block include Counsel Chambers, Booths Buildings, Chancery house, and buildings located at 50, 54 and 56 Lydiard Street South.

The lower part of Sturt Street includes the former Union and Unicorn Hotels, the Camp Hotel, Edinburgh Buildings, the blue tile faced commercial premises at 23 Sturt Street and the Australian Natives Association building which has a parapet decorated with a Kangaroo and Emu. The Precinct is architecturally significant for its high quality of substantially intact buildings with examples by notable contemporary architects from all periods ranging from 1860s-1950s. It demonstrates many original and early architectural design qualities associated with the civic and commercial development of the area from the 1850s. The main building characteristics include a solid masonry form of usually stone or ashlar render, similar heights and scale, Italianate detailing and other strongly related elements which constituted a single "composition." This together with a commonly held aesthetic ideal, where the hierarchy of decoration and ornaments, columns, cornices, framing of windows and sculpted motifs delineated spatial composition, contributed to the unity of a monumental streetscape. The predominantly symmetrical design of Renaissance Revival Victorian and Beaux Arts Edwardian architecture with elaborately ornate street verandahs, tree lined avenues, asphalt footpaths and 19th century engineering infrastructure have

created an historic centre of great unity and visual coherence.

The Precinct has aesthetic significance for its outstanding visual qualities of its setting, urban layout and architecture. The important visual qualities reflect the historical, cultural and architectural development of the precinct, and contribute to the contextual setting of Ballarat.

The qualities include the urban foci, notably many prominent and larger civic buildings, the dramatic topographical setting on the escarpment, intact Victorian streetscapes, the grid street pattern and gracious boulevard of Sturt Street. The important visual qualities of the Precinct are also enhanced by the street landscape design and layout that has contributed to the appearance of a gracious provincial City.

The Lydiard Street Precinct is **historically** significant at a **LOCAL** level (AHC criterion A, A4, Band H.1).

(a) the place's importance in the course, or pattern, of Australia's natural or cultural history;

(a.4) the importance for association with events, developments or cultural phases which have had a significant role in the human occupation and evolution of the nation, State, region or community;

(b) the place's possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Australia's cultural history;

(h) the place's special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Australia's natural or cultural history.

The Precinct was surveyed by the colonial Government Surveyor W.S.Urquhart in late 1851 and is an excellent example of the lasting influence of his work.

The Precinct is historically important for its association with the discovery of gold in the early 1850s. The alluvial rushes in Victoria commenced in August 1851 in the Ballarat area and were of major national and international significance. The Precinct is significant as the site of the Gold Commissioners Camp and the activities of the Native Police, the first police force on the goldfields. It provides the historical context and setting for Eureka Stockade rebellion in 1854 which was an outstanding event in Australia. The Eureka Rebellion as an historical event and the associated rebel miners' Southern Cross flag, have become symbols for democracy in Australia. The original Southern Cross flag is held in the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery located in the Precinct. The area is significant because of its potential to yield archaeological evidence of underground deposits or artifacts associated with the Government Camp.

The Precinct is historically important for its major contribution to the unified character of Ballarat's urban design that still retains the harmony of its foundation years. It has historic significance for its association with a number of significant activities that links together some of the main themes in the historical, social and architectural development of Ballarat.

The Precinct is associated with the early settlement of the area from squatters, demonstrated by the original use of Sturt Street, the formal layout of a township in the 1850s to the development of a municipality. Many of the individual civic buildings in the Precinct are designed by notable contemporary architects, and have associations with notable Ballarat citizens from the 1850s beyond.

The Lydiard Street Precinct is **scientifically** significant at a **LOCAL** level (AHC criterion C.2 and F).

(c) the place's potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Australia's natural or cultural history;

(f) the place's importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

The Precinct is of importance for contributing to the history of infrastructure development in Ballarat West, identified by intact bluestone kerbs and gutters.

The Lydiard Street Precinct is **socially** significant at a **LOCAL** level (AHC criterion G.1).

(g) the place's strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

The Precinct is recognized and highly valued by the wider community for civic, commercial and religious reasons. The Precinct is culturally important as it demonstrates the particular social structure of Ballarat during the 19th century which was conducive to a universally admired aesthetic.

Hermes Number 156830

Property Number

Physical Description 1

The Lydiard Street Precinct is dissected by Sturt Street running east / west from Dawson Street to the Bridge Mall and Lydiard Street north / south from the railway to Grant Street. The northern boundary follows Market Street and turns southwards at Armstrong Street to include properties on the northern side fronting Mair Street and both sides of Lydiard Street to the railway area. It then returns south crossing Mair Street to include Camp Street then east along Field Street, south along Cattin Street and along the property boundary east to Grenville Street. The eastern boundary follows Grenville Street to Little Bridge Street where it aligns with the rear of the properties fronting Lewis Street to Albert Street. The southern boundary is formed by Grant Street between Albert and Armstrong Streets and then along property boundaries until Dana Street to Doveton Street. The western boundary extends along Dawson Street and includes buildings fronting Sturt Street to Dawson Street, and Doveton Street to Mair Street.

The Lydiard Street precinct is of state significance.

The precinct was first surveyed by the government surveyor William Urquart, who laid out the city centre on the plateau using a four-block grid pattern. In that plan, Lydiard and Armstrong Streets were main thoroughfares and Mair, Dana and Sturt Streets were cross streets. The survey did not extend east beyond Lydiard Street being the site of the government camp. The camp was the administrative centre established to keep order on the goldfields and was strategically located at the edge of the township where it had views across the diggings.

The precinct includes Ballarat's significant civic, institutional, religious and commercial buildings and monuments. The collection of buildings reflects the wealth that the 1851 gold discoveries brought to Ballarat influenced by the Anglo Saxon immigrants who diversified into other occupations following the gold rush.

Buildings and features in the precinct show the features associated with the civic and commercial development of the area from the 1850's. Notable contemporary architects, such as Casselli & Figgis and Leonard Terry designed many of the civic and commercial buildings. The significant and contributory buildings are predominantly Victorian, Federation, Edwardian and Inter War styles and feature ornate detailing, verandahs and intact interiors and exteriors.

Subdivision of parts of the government camp in the late to mid 1880's was followed by the construction of 'boom style' architecture on the new lots which included the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, the Old Colonialists Hall, the Mining Exchange, the Ballarat Commercial Club and Bones Buildings. Together with the Post Office and the Victorian buildings on the west side of Lydiard Street, this group of buildings created a distinctive 'boom style' streetscape.

The opening of the railway line attracted hospitality businesses and warehouses to Lydiard Street north, while Lydiard Street South became the focus for the legal and financial businesses. The oldest operating theatre in mainland Australia, Her Majesty's theatre is a substantial presence in Lydiard Street south.

Substantial churches were established at the corner of Dana and Lydiard Streets and added to the importance of Lydiard Street. The character of Sturt Street was being defined in the 1860's with the development of the dual carriageway divided by a udbank, later planted with shrubs and trees known as the Camp Street gardens. The central median strip provided a civic space for structures, monuments and memorials.

Sturt Street originally housed timber buildings but by the 1870's these were replaced by brick shops. Other significant commercial and institutional buildings include the Town Hall, the Myer building and Golden City Hotel.

Key features of the precinct include the retention of the original street grid pattern, the topographical setting of the escarpment, the gracious boulevard of Sturt Street, and significant landmarks. Also included are the intact bluestone kerbs and gutters and remnants of cobblestone paved lanes, two areas of original street paving of

large bluestone flagstones, a retained section of tramlines and timber block paving along the north edge of the median strip in Sturt Street near the corner of Armstrong Street, an early cast iron post box in Lydiard Street.

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 data owner.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>