
Rokewood Presbyterian Church Complex



Presbyterian Church



Presbyterian Church

Location

60 Ferrars Road ROKEWOOD, GOLDEN PLAINS SHIRE

Municipality

GOLDEN PLAINS SHIRE

Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO101

HO61

Heritage Listing

Golden Plains Shire

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is Significant?

The Rokewood Presbyterian Church, 60 Ferrars Road, Rokewood, has outstanding significance as a predominantly intact example of an unusual and distinguished Victorian Decorated Gothic-styled Presbyterian Church in a rural setting. Built in 1865-66, it represents the first major design by the prolific and notable architect,

Alexander Davidson, who had been enticed to emigrate from Scotland to Rokewood by his uncle, Rev. John Cooper, the Presbyterian Minister at Rokewood between 1859 and 1866. A landmark in the small township of Rokewood, the contextually large scale and elaborate building is a legacy of the wealthy benefactors of the Presbyterian Church in the Rokewood district, notably the Russell family of 'Wurrock' and the Elder families of the Kuruc-a-ruc Estate and 'The Meadows'. The significance of the church is embodied in its design and construction, the coursed bluestone Victorian Decorative Gothic Revival styled building being characterised by a distinctive articulation of steeply-pitched and parapeted gable roof forms clad in slate (comprising a cruciform layout) and a landmark tower with broach spire added in 1905. In addition to the tower and spire, the decorative tracery windows and freestone dressings - and particularly the stylised trefoil and half-trefoil motifs in the gable apexes, ends to the parapet corbels and the Italian-pointed ventilators - became common design details in Davidson's subsequent work. Internally, the church is especially notable for its elegant timber collar and tie roof trusses having curved ribs supported by plaster consoles, timber-lined ceiling and original timber pews and surviving timber liturgical furniture also designed by Davidson. Four memorial plaques adorn the walls in memory of members of the Russell and Elder families. The rear Victorian Carpenter Gothic-styled hall was built in c.1862 as the Church of England church at Smythesdale. It was relocated to the Rokewood Church site in 1951, having been funded by Miss Gladys Bell, a wealthy benefactor associated with the nearby Wurrock South Estate. Opened in 1952, it was named after Miss Bell's late brother, Alan Bell. The hall contributes to the significance of the Rokewood Presbyterian Church.

How is it Significant?

The Rokewood Presbyterian Church is architecturally, historically and socially significant at a state level.

Why is it Significant?

The Rokewood Presbyterian Church, Rokewood, is historically significant (Practice Note Criteria A & H) for its associations with the development and witness of the Presbyterian Church in the Rokewood district since its construction in 1865-66 (the vestry being added in 1874 and the tower and spire in 1905). The Church also has associations with the initial establishment of Presbyterianism as early as 1847 when the Rev John Gow was inducted to the pastoral Charge of Colac and Woody Yalloak (later named Rokewood). The prosperity of the Rokewood Presbyterian Church came from a number of wealthy benefactors from nearby pastoral properties, including the Russell family of Wurrock and the Elder family of Kuruc-a-ruc and The Meadows, together with the rapid growth of the township as a result of the gold boom in Rokewood and surrounding districts in the 1850s and 1860s. The Rokewood Presbyterian Church has associations with numerous clergy and members of the congregation who have played key roles in its life and witness. Of particular note was the Rev. John Cooper who enticed his architect-nephew, Alexander Davidson, to emigrate to Rokewood in 1864. Davidson was responsible for the design of the Rokewood Church (including the vestry in 1874 and the tower and spire in 1905) and it was a precursor to numerous church, homestead and other commissions (a sizeable number for Presbyterian squatters in the Western District) until his death in 1908. In partnership with his cousin, George Henderson, between 1867 and 1877, the architectural firm of Davidson and Henderson established a highly successful practice, creating unique designs partly based on the writings of the French architect, Viollet-le-Duc and his *Dictionnaire*. Another notable figure associated with the church is Miss Gladys Bell, an important benefactor who funded the relocation of the former Smythesdale Church of England to the Rokewood Church site in 1951. The former church building opened as the Alan Bell Memorial Hall (in memory of Gladys Bell's brother).

The Rokewood Presbyterian Church, Shelford, is architecturally significant (Practice Note Criteria D & E) as an outstanding and contextually elaborate example of Victorian Decorated Gothic Presbyterian Church architecture in the Shire and State of Victoria. This is especially identified in the cruciform plan comprising intersecting steeply pitched gables, landmark tower with broach spire (added in 1905) and in the well-considered and holistic detailing of stylised trefoil and half-trefoil motifs that were features of other works by the architect, Davidson. Internally, the holistic approach to the design is continued, with the unusual and elegant timber collar and tie roof trusses having curved ribs supported by plaster consoles, timber-lined ceiling and original timber pews and surviving timber liturgical furniture.

The architectural significance of the Church hall has been partly compromised by its location on elevated stumps (resulting from its relocation) and modest skillion kitchen addition. However, it contributes to the significance of the place as a physical embodiment of its former role as the Church of England at Smythesdale (c.1862-1951) and from 1951 as the Presbyterian Sunday School and Hall at Rokewood.

The Rokewood Presbyterian Church, Rokewood, is socially significant (Practice Note Criterion G) as it is recognised and valued by sections of the local community for religious reasons, as a symbol of their faith and their history of local participation in faith education. The church interior includes four memorials to members of the Russell and Elder families, pioneers of the district and active members of the Church. These memorials therefore have commemorative value.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Golden Plains - Golden Plains Shire Heritage Study Phase 2, Heritage Matters P/L, 2009;
Hermes Number	185013
Property Number	

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