# CLUNES TOWN HALL AND COURT HOUSE



H2180 Clunes Town Hall &amp; Court House



H2180 Clunes Town Hall - Main Hall



H2180 Clunes Town Hall - Hall ceiling 023



H2180 Clunes Town Hall War Memorial - Richard Ford



H2180 Clunes Court House - Court Room



Before Photograph - Reference F3919 2014



H2180 Clunes Town Hall and Court House amended plan

## Location

98 BAILEY STREET CLUNES, HEPBURN SHIRE

## Municipality

# HEPBURN SHIRE

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2180

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO188

## VHR Registration

November 13, 2008

## Amendment to Registration

May 14, 2009

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 18, 1993

What is significant?

The Clunes Town Hall and Court House was designed by Percy Oakden and constructed by William Cowland in 1872-3. The distinctive Victorian Free Classical style building is a reflection of the civic pride and community confidence of a gold town at the peak of its prosperity.

In July 1851 it was announced that payable gold had been discovered near Clunes. Clunes' fortunes fluctuated during the early 1850s and it was not until the Port Phillip and Colonial Gold Mining Company began quartz crushing operations that the town experienced significant development. The township of Clunes was surveyed in 1858 and in 1861, Allotment 7 of Section 4 was temporarily reserved for municipal purposes for the newly proclaimed Borough of Clunes. Architect Percy Oakden was appointed to produce a design for the Town Hall, Borough Offices and Court House in late 1871. A grant of £2100 from the Victorian Government to the Clunes Borough Council for a court house, tied to a 999 year lease, provided sufficient funds to construct a substantial civic building. The foundation stone was laid by the Chief Secretary of Victoria, Charles Gavan Duffy in April 1872 and the Town Hall opened in May 1873.

Oakden's design was for a symmetrical building, with the Borough offices and Police Court flanking the two-storeyed central hall. The Police Court consists of court room, barrister's office and holding cell on the lower level and clerks' and magistrate's offices on an upper level. Much of its original furniture is extant. The lavish main hall is of particular note, with its decorative ceiling, lunette windows and stage. The Town Hall was the centre of social functions for nearly a century, and modifications to the building to accommodate entertainment include the early dressing rooms, the 1916 stage remodelling to include proscenium arch, backdrops and curtain painted by Richard Ford, the modifications for the screening of picture shows and the relocation of the Bible Christian Church for use as the Supper Room.

The building was a symbolic centre for community loyalty and sense of belonging, evidenced by the large World War I memorial on the western wall of the main hall. The memorial consisted of the painted rising sun by Richard Ford and the collection of 152 individual photographs of local servicemen and women, which originally hung alongside it.

In December 1982, the Government revoked the appointment of the Clunes Court House during a period of rationalisation of court facilities. With the amalgamation of the Borough of Clunes and the Shire of Talbot, the Clunes Town Hall was no longer the location of municipal operations. Though with the growth in car usage and changing tastes in entertainment, the Town Hall gradually became less of a focus for community functions and leisure activities, it remains a significant place for the township of Clunes.

How is it significant?

The Clunes Town Hall and Court House is of historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

Clunes Town Hall and Court House is of historical significance as a civic building constructed at the height of a gold town's prosperity, demonstrating the confidence that such towns had in their future.

The town hall is of historical and architectural importance in demonstrating the continuing role that such municipal buildings played in the civic and social life of rural townships in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The World War I memorial and associated photographs demonstrate the importance of the place to the Clunes community and is of historical significance. The adaptation of the main hall for entertainment purposes, to accommodate stage productions and film screenings, is of historical significance in demonstrating the development of cultural facilities in rural communities.

The collection of objects associated with the Clunes Town Hall is of historical significance in demonstrating the judicial, municipal and cultural usages of the building. The collection of *in situ* original Court House furniture is of particular note.

The Clunes Town Hall and Court House is of architectural significance as a striking and eclectic municipal building design by Percy Oakden, and a rare rural example of a combined Court House and Town Hall.

The Clunes Town Hall and Court House is significant to the State of Victoria in demonstrating the importance of civic buildings and government institutions to rural community life and the aspirations of newly established gold rush towns wishing to assert their status and wealth. The Clunes Town Hall and Court House was adapted to accommodate many developments in the cultural and social life of Clunes, including entertainment, commemoration and community functions, which contribute to its significance.


## 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. Note: All archaeological places have the potential to contain significant sub-surface artefacts and other remains. In most cases it will be necessary to obtain approval from the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria before the undertaking any works that have a significant sub-surface component. 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.

Interior:

Painting of previously painted walls and ceilings provided that preparation or painting does not remove evidence of any original paint or other decorative scheme.

Installation, removal or replacement of carpets and/or flexible floor coverings.

Installation, removal or replacement of hooks, nails and other devices for the hanging of mirrors, paintings and other wall mounted art or religious works or icons.

Refurbishment of existing bathrooms, toilets and kitchens including removal, installation or replacement of sanitary fixtures and associated piping, mirrors, wall and floor coverings.

Installation, removal or replacement of electrical wiring.

Installation of new fire hydrant services including sprinklers, fire doors and elements affixed to plaster surfaces.

**Exterior:**
Minor repairs and maintenance to buildings, structures and services within the registered land (but not new buildings and structures).

| | |
|---|---|
| Construction dates | 1872, |
| Architect/Designer | Fox, James Henry, Oakden, Percy, |

| Heritage Act Categories | Registered place, Registered object integral to a registered place, |
|---|---|
| Hermes Number | 2040 |
| Property Number | |

## History

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

Clunes

The district around Clunes was occupied by pastoralists and squatters until the discovery of payable gold fields in 1851. James Esmond was widely credited with making the first 'discovery' of gold in Victoria, near to present day Clunes. Though there is evidence of earlier discoveries of gold, it was news of Esmond's find that led the Melbourne Daily News to declare 'Victoria is gold country'. By September 1851 there were 100 men working at Clunes, but due to the hard physical labour required, many left for more accessible gold in Buninyong, Mount Alexander and Ballarat. There was a rush of 400 miners in September 1855 which brought attention back to the quartz reefs at Clunes, though until 1857, small scale mining dominated at Clunes. The most important mining company in Clunes, the Port Phillip and Colonial Gold Mining Company and the co-operative of mining company known as the Clunes Quartz Mining Company began quartz crushing operations at Clunes in May 1857. The development of the Clunes township was slow and sustained over a longer period than many of the 'overnight' gold towns. Commercial premises were erected along the main thoroughfare, later known as Fraser Street, from around 1856. By the end of 1858, Clunes was prosperous town, prompting the *Ballarat Star* to report 'there are six or seven public houses, all open and doing fair trade. There is, also, a large number of restaurants and boarding houses [.] stores of all kinds [.] there are also two places of public worship, and a third is about to be erected', and the population was estimated at 3000.

The survey of the Township of Clunes was undertaken by John Templeton in 1858, though the first land sales did not take place until two years later. The survey avoided the *ad hoc* concentrations of buildings on the low lying area, in the hope that businesses would relocate to the allotments on the higher ground. Section 4 of the town, which was bounded by Bailey, Service, Templeton Streets and an unnamed street, was reserved for institutional purposes. The contract for the Post and Telegraph Office was signed in 1860, with the reserve fenced off and telegraph connect in 1861, the first public facility on the section. Allotment 7, a two and a half acre site was temporarily reserved for a market place and future council chambers for the newly formed Borough of Clunes Council in December 1861. The Wesleyans, Presbyterians and Roman Catholics all had reserves approved for their use in the early 1860s. Much of Fraser Street was rebuilt during the late 1860s and early 1870s, with many timber structures making way for locally made brick buildings. This period, which was the peak of Clunes' prosperity, saw the construction of such buildings as the Union, National and ES&A Banks, and the Club Hotel. The Clunes Post Office was built in 1861 and replaced in 1879 by the imposing two-storey post office building which still stands. [*schools and churches*] The expectations of permanence demonstrated in many of these buildings reflect the confidence the community had that prosperous times would continue. The population of Clunes peaked in 1873 at 6000.

Reference:
Richard Aitken, *Talbot and Clunes Conservation Study*.
Ward, Andrew. *Typological study of local government offices / halls in Victoria.*

*Percy Oakden*
The architect of the Clunes Town Hall and Courthouse, Percy Oakden, was born in Launceston in 1845 and arrived in Victoria in 1868. He spent six years as borough architect for Ballarat, most notably merging Lorenz's exterior and Casselli's interior designs for the Ballarat Town Hall into a cohesive composition. He also completed designs for a number of churches in Melbourne during this period, including the Congregational Church in Victoria Parade and the Wesleyan Church in Sydney Road, Brunswick. Upon moving to Melbourne, Oakden formed a successful partnership with Leonard Terry in 1874. The individual architects maintained their distinctive styles, and Oakden's hand can be seen in buildings the firm produced including the Wesleyan Church in Nicholson Street, North Fitzroy, and state schools in King Street, West Melbourne and Wilson Street, Brighton.

Percy Oakden's designs tended to be brown brick with cream or warm red dressings and patterns, and the incorporation Gothic influences (Miles Lewis, ADB Online). After Terry's death in 1884,

Characteristic features of Oakden buildings include heavily moulded arches, pairs of Gothic windows and pierced parapets, elements of which can be seen in the Clunes Town Hall. In 1887, the firm became Oakden, Addison & Kemp, designing Queens College at the University of Melbourne in 1883-7 and the New Zealand Insurance building in Collins Street, Melbourne. In the 1890s, the practice became Oakden & Kemp, but dwindled during the depression. Oakden was the honorary director of architectural classes at the Working Men's College and elected a fellow and councillor of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects in 1890, and the president in 1892, 1897 and 1901. He died at Brighton in 1917, survived by his wife.

References.

- Miles Lewis, Australian Dictionary Online

HISTORY OF PLACE

In 1861, the newly proclaimed Borough of Clunes council requested Allotment 7 of Section 4 for council purposes and a two acre site was temporarily reserved. In 1865, a Council deputation sought a £1500 contribution from the government towards the cost of constructing a Court House in connection with a Town Hall. Administering court facilities and systems were the jurisdiction of the Victorian Government, however such economic co-operation between municipal bodies and the government could provide more substantial and impressive buildings, therefore asserting the status of the town.

It was not until 1871 when Clunes Council was asked by the Department of Crown Lands to provide a court house for the district that any real progress was made. Percy Oakden was appointed to produce the final design for the Town Hall, Borough Offices and Court House in late 1871, after preliminary plans had been approved by the Public Works Department. Oakden's design was for a Gothic Revival influenced, symmetrical building, with the Borough offices and Police Court flanking the two-storeyed central hall. With the plans finalised, and William Cowley appointed to construct the building, the foundation stone was laid by the then Chief Secretary of Victoria, Charles Gavan Duffy, at a ceremony on April 4, 1872. In anticipation of the opening of the Court House, the police station was dismantled from its location on Camp Parade and re-erected on the part of the Municipal Reserve originally intended for it. A lease, dated 1874, granted £2100 to Clunes Council for the provision of a Court House, and gave the Justice Department a particularly long 999 years access right to the facility. It seems likely that the Clunes Town Hall was completed in March 1873, with the final cost amounting to £5314 after the decision was made to install a slate roof.

In May 1873, the town hall was officially opened, at a ceremony organised so as the Governor of Victoria could attend. The *Illustrated Australian News* declared it to be 'one of the most pretentious public buildings in the non-metro boroughs' and the hall to be 'one of the noblest rooms in the district'. The splendour of both the building and the occasion asserted the confidence and pride of the local community; Clunes was at the height of its prosperity in 1973.

For nearly a century, the Clunes Town Hall was the centre of civic and social events for the town. School concerts, choral competitions, flower shows and exhibitions were held from soon after its opening. The potential for the hall to be a focus of entertainment within the community must have quickly become clear to the Council, who by 1877 were requesting an extension to include of stage facilities, the compromised outcome being the incorporation of a stage at the end of the hall. The stage underwent an elaborate remodelling in 1916, with the installation of a proscenium arch and the scenic curtain and backdrop painted by local artist, Richard Ford. The Assembly Room, originally the Bible Christian Church was moved from its original Fraser Street location, to the rear of the Borough Offices, to provide a dining area. Dances were particularly popular during the 1930s and 1940s, and up to 400 people would attend community singing sessions aimed at lifting spirits during World War II. From 1919, the upstairs office was adapted to become the projection room for picture shows held on Friday and Saturday nights. That the Town Hall was a significant feature of community life is demonstrated in the large memorial to the local soldiers and nurses involved in World War I, painted on the western wall of the main hall by Richard Ford in 1922.

The Court House was used for the Court of Petty Sessions, or Police Court, the Court of Mines and a Licensing Court. Three times a year, Court of General sessions were held at Clunes. In December 1982, the Government revoked the appointment of the Clunes Court House during a period of rationalisation of court facilities. The 999 year lease was cancelled, and the Council was given permission to occupy the building for municipal purposes

(CMP: 16).

With the amalgamation of the Borough of Clunes and the Shire of Talbot, the Clunes Town Hall was no longer the location of municipal operations, though it continued to be utilised for civic and social functions. With the growth in car usage and changing tastes in entertainment, the Town Hall gradually became less of a focus for community functions and leisure activities. Most recently, Wesley College has used the town hall for its classes during its Year 9 residential program.

References: Gasparetto, Nadia. Clunes *Town Hall & Court House, Conservation Plan*. 2000
Aitken, Richard. *Talbot and Clunes Conservation Study*.
Ward, Andrew. *Typological study of local government offices / halls in Victoria*.

## Plaque Citation

**Clunes Town Hall & Court House**
This combined Town Hall and Court House was built to a striking Percy Oakden design in 1872-3. It demonstrates the confidence of a wealthy gold town and the importance of civic buildings to rural communities.

## Extent of Registration

1. All the land marked L1 on Diagram 2180 held by the Executive Director, being part of the land described as Crown Allotment 7, Section 4, Township of Clunes.

2. All the building marked B1 on Diagram 2180 held by the Executive Director.

B1 Town Hall and Court House

3. All the objects associated with the place as included in the list entitled 'Clunes Town Hall & Court House - List of Objects' (dated August 2008) and 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/*