

# CUSTOMS HOUSE



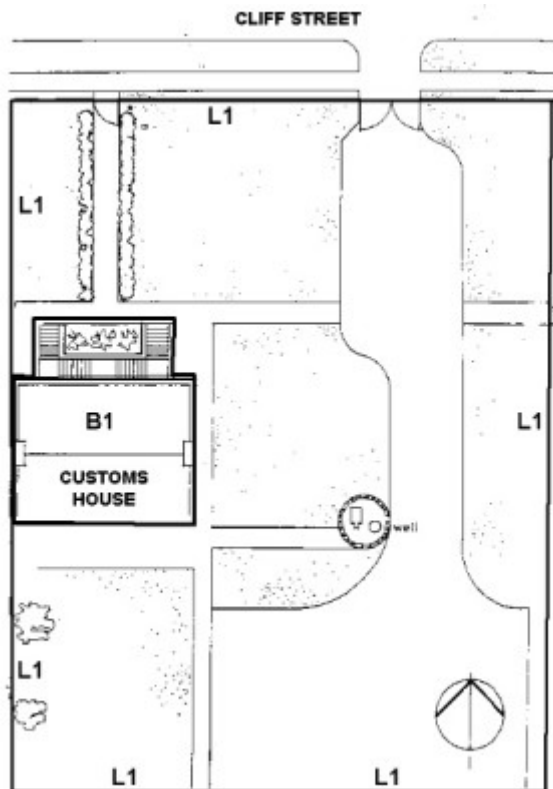
CUSTOMS HOUSE SOHE  
2008



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1 portland customs front view  
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H1844 customs house portland plan

## Location

95 CLIFF STREET PORTLAND, GLENELG SHIRE

## Municipality

GLENELG SHIRE

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1844

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO36

## VHR Registration

November 18, 1999

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - October 27, 1999

What is significant?

The Portland Customs House was built in 1849-50 and is the oldest of its type in Victoria, and the only remaining customs house which survives from Victoria's pre-Separation period. The design of the Customs House at Portland is attributed to the Colonial Clerk of Works to the Port Phillip district Henry Ginn.

How is it significant?

The Portland Customs House is of historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Portland Customs House is the only surviving example of its stylistic type. It is important because of its association with the earliest phase of government administration in Victoria; the other stylistically similar customs houses were constructed at Melbourne and Geelong and have not survived. It is able to illustrate the importance of customs houses in the collection of tariff duties, one of the major sources of revenue for Victoria prior to the introduction of Federal income taxation in 1915. The design of the Customs House at Portland is important in its ability to reflect the operations of colonial and federal customs through the retention of the Long Room, offices and, below on the ground floor, the bond store and accommodation for the customs master. It is also a rare example of the Colonial Clerk of Works Henry Ginn' work. The Customs House also demonstrates the pre-eminence of Portland in the early days of the state's history, a pre-eminence soon superseded by Melbourne.

## 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 alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.
2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of alterations 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 alteration shall cease and the Executive Director shall be notified as soon as possible.
3. If there is a conservation policy and plan approved by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it.
4. Nothing in this declaration prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.
5. Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authority where applicable.

The following works are permit exempt:

\*refinishing the interiors of the building on both levels provided that the decorative scheme follows a natural or heritage theme.

\*The recovering of floors in carpet or an impervious material in the wet areas is permit exempt provided those works are reversible.

\*Replacement of Toilet bowl, cistern, vanity basin and sink and cupboards with similar items are permit exempt provided those works do not cause further damage to the building. All plumbing to be run internally.

Construction dates	1849,
Architect/Designer	Ginn, Henry,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	4190
Property Number	

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## History

The Port Phillip District was in every sense an outpost of the New South Wales colony. The settlements in the district were illegal and the government was well aware of the smuggling of stock, tobacco and spirits from Van Dieman's land, without the payment of duties at the customs houses at official settlements. This undermined the revenue collections of the New South Wales government which was supposed to be self funding and a source of revenue for Britain. But, although the evasion of duties at Port Phillip eroded revenue, the home government was reluctant to expand expensive customs operations in the district. However, in response to the rapid expansion of

the Port Phillip District by the mid 1830s, it was grudgingly decided that a branch of the customs department should be created to regulate the trade. The customs branch was to report to New South Wales, and the cost of its administration and other government costs offset by land sales and the receipt of duties.

In 1850 Victoria was declared a separate colony and responsibility for custom's administration was vested in the Victorian Colonial Government. A tariff on items such as spirits, wine, beer, tobacco, sugar, teas and coffee established earlier was continued by the Victorian colonial government. The revenue generated, some £329,627 in 1852, was a welcome addition to a colony struggling to meet the greatly increased cost of government administration caused by the discovery of gold and the associated influx of immigrants. After an economic boom during the 1850s aided by the gold rushes, Victoria suffered a recession during the 1860s. A protectionist trade policy was formulated to encourage local industries and to protect them from intercolonial and overseas competition. Customs duties on imported goods and those made in other colonies were set at much higher levels than ones made locally of local materials. This policy proved a successful and lucrative one for the government and continued as a source of revenue long after the economy improved.

At the time of Federation one national customs department was created, eliminating the competing colonial ones. Until 1914 customs and excise provided the bulk of government revenue. In 1915 Federal income tax was introduced to support Commonwealth activities and the expenditure brought about by the First World War. From 1915 onwards the rapid industrialisation of Australia expanded custom's role in fostering local industry.

Today the Australian Customs Service, in addition to administering industry assistance measures, is involved in policing and controlling the importation or exportation of goods.

#### History of Place:

The Portland Customs House was built in 1849-50 probably to the design of Henry Ginn the Clerk of Works for the Port Phillip district of New South Wales. Portland's natural port was used by the Henty family, who settled there in 1834, and the sealers and whalers who set up less-permanent bases in the area. The port was increasingly used after the wool and wheat industry was established in the western district. Goods transported from Tasmania and further afield were also off-loaded at Portland, initially without paying the required customs duties. The construction of the Customs House in 1849-50 curtailed this activity.

Portland's Custom House was intended to be imposing. It was constructed on high ground and designed to be impressive, even formidable. It symbolised the authority of the government. The height of the building and location of the Long Room and offices on the first floor was intended to enable the officers, supposedly, to view all activities on the wharves. Those arriving by sea could also immediately identify the customs house, and therefore where to pay duties. Arrivals also knew that any illegal dealings could be watched by the customs officer.

Security was an important issue in the design of customs house. This was necessary because the colony's earlier customs house were built in areas where smuggling was rife, and where the amount of duty to be collected and enforced was sufficiently lucrative to warrant their construction. Portland, with its Long Room raised to the first floor, allowed a secure bond store to be located on the ground floor for holding goods until the duty was paid. Cool and dry conditions existed in the bond store and the walls were thick and solid by necessity, to prevent theft. The first floor location of the customs house also allowed accommodation for the custom master.

A solid and prominent custom's house like that at Portland was a source of pride, as well as an indication of the importance of the port to the colony. It is also indicative of the hopes and aspirations the residents of Portland had for their town; hopes which were not realised once Melbourne successfully asserted its pre-eminence as the colony's, and then the state's, major city.

The Portland Customs House is the last surviving of this style of custom houses, although similar were built at Melbourne and Geelong during the same period.

#### **Assessment Against Criteria**

#### Criterion A

The historical importance, association with or relationship to Victoria's history of the place or object.

The Portland Customs House is able to demonstrate the pre-eminence of Portland in the early days of the state's history.

#### Criterion B

The importance of a place or object in demonstrating rarity or uniqueness.

The Portland Customs House is the only surviving example of its stylistic type. The other stylistically similar customs houses were constructed at Melbourne and Geelong have not survived.

#### Criterion C

The place or object's potential to educate, illustrate or provide further scientific investigation in relation to Victoria's cultural heritage.

The Portland Customs House illustrates the importance of customs houses in the collection of tariff duties, one of the a major sources of revenue for Victoria prior to the introduction of Federal income taxation in 1915.

#### Criterion D

The importance of a place or object in exhibiting the principal characteristics or the representative nature of a place or object as part of a class or type of places or objects.

The Portland Customs House is important as the earliest surviving customs house in Victoria.

#### Criterion E

The importance of the place or object in exhibiting good design or aesthetic characteristics and/or in exhibiting a richness, diversity or unusual integration of features.

The design of the Customs House at Portland is important in its ability to reflect the operations of colonial and federal customs through the retention of the Long Room, offices and, below on the ground floor, the bond store and accommodation for the customs master.

#### Criterion F

The importance of the place or object in demonstrating or being associated with scientific or technical innovations or achievements.

#### Criterion G

The importance of the place or object in demonstrating social or cultural associations.

The Portland Customs House is important because of its association with the earliest phase of government administration in Victoria.

#### Criterion H

Any other matter which the Council considers relevant to the determination of cultural heritage significance

## **Extent of Registration**

### NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the Heritage Act, I give notice under section 46 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including the Heritage Register Number 1844 in the category described as a Heritage place:

Customs House, Cliff Street, Portland, Glenelg Shire Council.

EXTENT:

1. All of the buildings known as the Portland Customs House marked B1 on diagram 1844 held by the Executive Director.
2. All the land marked L1 on Diagram 603714 held by the Executive Director, being all the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 5758 Folio 487.

Dated: 4 November 1999.

RAY TONKIN

Executive Director

[*Victoria Government Gazette* G 46 18 November 1999 p.2456]

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*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/>*