

# Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated 22/11/19



## MAYDAY HILLS HOSPITAL



MAYDAY HILLS HOSPITAL SOHE 2008



h01189 1 mayday hills hospital albert rd  
beechworth administration building



mayday hills hospital albert street  
beechworth rear view dec1984



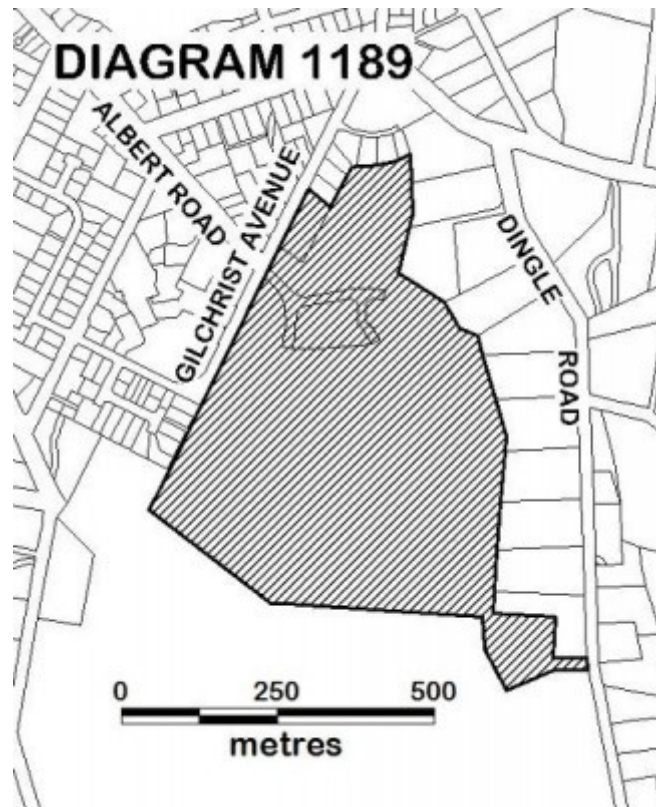
h01189 mayday hills hospital albert rd  
beechworth female wing



h01189 mayday hills hospital albert rd  
beechworth gatehouse



h01189 mayday hills hospital albert rd  
beechworth male wing



Mayday Hills\_H1189\_Plan

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### Location

ALBERT ROAD BEECHWORTH, Indigo Shire

### Municipality

INDIGO SHIRE

### Level of significance

Registered

### Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1189

### Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO7

## **VHR Registration**

August 20, 1982

## **Amendment to Registration**

February 11, 2016

## **Heritage Listing**

Victorian Heritage Register

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## **Statement of Significance**

Last updated on - February 8, 2016

What is significant?

Mayday Hills Hospital, consisting of a variety of buildings constructed since the establishment of the institution in 1864. The majority of these buildings are contained within a landscape setting which includes part of original brick walls and associated ha-ha. A small group of farm buildings, including a cob building, are located to the south-east of the site.

### *History Summary*

The Mayday Hills Hospital was constructed as the Beechworth Lunatic Asylum between 1864 and 1867 to designs by the Public Works Department (PWD). Together with asylums at Kew and Ararat, the design of the asylum was based on administrative, planning and medical principles developed in Britain. The original asylum building was contained within a fenced compound, with ha-ha, and the grounds were developed to create an attractive and functional landscape. Active work was considered imperative for patients and workshops were located near the male accommodation and laundries and drying yards near the female accommodation. Farm land located south of the compound also provided patients with productive work. Extensive additions were made to the main building in 1873 and detached cottages with enclosed courtyards were constructed in the late 1880s. In the post-war era the treatment of the mentally ill underwent radical change and many buildings were added to the hospital and earlier buildings were modernised. Mayday Hills Hospital closed in 1995, and the complex was sold to La Trobe University, with various community and commercial organisations occupying parts of the site. The university campus was closed in 2011 and the site sold to a private owner.

### *Description Summary*

The Mayday Hills Hospital site comprises buildings constructed in a number of periods: the initial construction phase (1864-79); subsequent expansion (1880-90); modernisation, including a nurses' hostel and ward by PWD architect Percy Everett (1921-50); later development (1951-95) and the period of occupation by La Trobe University (1996-2012). The first phase included a large E-shaped cement rendered building, designed in an Italianate style with corner towers, and a separate morgue constructed to the west in 1868. The main building contained accommodation, administration, laundry, kitchens, stores and a recreation hall. This and later buildings are set within what is now an extensive parkland containing mature exotic and native trees. Parts of the original surrounding wall and ha-ha and one of two entrance lodges remain on the site. Farm land associated with the asylum contains stables (1873), a barn and a small building of earth construction.

This site is part of the traditional land of the Kulin Nation.

### *How is it significant?*

Mayday Hills Hospital is of historical, architectural, technical and aesthetic significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criteria for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

#### Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

#### Criterion B

Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

#### Criterion D

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places and objects.

#### Criterion E

Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

#### Criterion F

Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

#### *Why is it significant?*

Mayday Hills Hospital is significant at the State level for the following reasons:

Mayday Hills Hospital is historically significant for its physical manifestation of the changing approaches to the treatment of mental illness in Victoria from institutional confinement to treatment and rehabilitation. The asylum at Beechworth was a key component in a larger system of nineteenth century state asylums in Victoria which included those at Kew and Ararat. [Criterion A]

The cob farm building at Mayday Hills Hospital is a rare surviving example of cob construction in Victoria. It is one of few known surviving examples in Victoria. [Criterion B]

Mayday Hills Hospital is architecturally significant as a particularly fine example of an extensive complex of Italianate asylum buildings dating from the 1860s, and in the case of the cottages, the 1880s. The design is based on an influential asylum at Colney Hatch in England and, in common with other contemporary institutions notably Willsmere in Kew and Aradale at Ararat, displays key characteristic features such as the E shaped plan of the main administration, kitchen and dormitory block with its airing courts and covered walkways, as well as the gatehouse, mortuary and ha-ha wall. The design of the 1860s buildings has been attributed to Public Works Department architect, J J Clark. [Criterion D]

The cob farm building at Mayday Hills Hospital is technically significant for the unusual use of cob construction for a small farm building on the site. Double roof construction was used with the inner walls constructed of earth. The technique uses puddled clay, mixed with straw and water, which is laid in courses in a plastic state, without formwork, and pared down once dry. [Criterion E]

Mayday Hills Hospital is aesthetically important for the beauty of its picturesque setting on a prominent hill among extensive parklands, which comprises native and introduced trees and shrubs. The curved drive with its avenue of large oaks is particularly noteworthy. [Criterion F]

## **Theme**

### 4. Transforming and managing the land 8. Building community life

Construction dates	1864,
Architect/Designer	Clark, John James,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	BEECHWORTH LUNATIC ASYLUM, MAY DAY HILLS HOSPITAL,
Hermes Number	96

## History

### CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

Beechworth owes its existence to the discovery of gold in 1852. The Beechworth area was first settled by squatters from 1837, but the discovery of gold resulted in a rush of miners to the area, with about 8,000 arriving by November that year. The Ovens was an important river system in north-east Victoria and gave its name to the goldfields in this area. The town developed around the Gold Commissioner's Camp, established in 1852 on the granite hill on the north bank of Spring Creek. The township was first known as Mayday Hills, but when surveyed in 1853, it was named Beechworth. The main overland route between Melbourne and Sydney passed through the town until the 1870s (when the railway was built further to the west), and until then Beechworth was one of the richest towns in Victoria and the financial and administrative centre of the north-east .

Until the mid-1850s most buildings in the town were constructed of wood, bark or canvas, but following the election of a town council in 1856 building regulations were introduced. Many of the town's major buildings were erected during the following five years, including the Ovens District Hospital (1856, VHR H358) and the Burke Museum (VHR H345, begun in 1857 by the Young Men's Association as a hall and library), and the first town hall was built in 1859. By the early 1860s a group of important administrative buildings, known as the Beechworth Justice Precinct (VHR H1464), had been completed along the south side of Ford Street, and a large gaol (VHR H1549) was begun to the north of this in 1858. The Beechworth Lunatic Asylum, later the Mayday Hills Hospital (VHR H1864-67) was built in 1864-67, and the landmark post office (VHR H867) was completed in 1870.

The Ovens gold rushes peaked in 1857, and during the following two decades the population of Beechworth decreased (though the last mining company in the district only closed in 1956). Despite the decline in the gold industry the town was sustained well into the twentieth century by the presence of the government institutions founded in the 1850s and 1860s: the asylum and the gaol.

Tourism has now become a major industry in Beechworth. Tourism began in the 1880s with the town's reputation as a health resort and picturesque beauty spot. The declining prosperity of the town had the advantage that the post-World War II development that led to the destruction of so much of Victoria's nineteenth century fabric during the 1950s-70s was avoided. At this time there was an increasing awareness of the importance of Victoria's early history and heritage. In the 1960s the National Trust was active in classifying Beechworth's early buildings, and efforts began to restore buildings which had fallen into disrepair. The retention of much of the town's historic character has now made it a popular tourist destination.

### PLACE HISTORY

The Mayday Hills Hospital was constructed as the Beechworth Lunatic Asylum between 1864 and 1867 on an elevated site with potential for expansion. The original buildings and structures were arranged within a large square compound fenced by a brick wall and ha-ha. Various additions were made to the buildings and the site in the 1870s and 1880s and the extensive parkland of exotic and native trees developed from the asylum's establishment. In 1878 it was reported that land under cultivation at the asylum included '16 acres on the farm, 12 acres in the kitchen gardens, and about 31 acres of ornamental ground, consisting of lawns, shrubberies, flower beds, walks and avenues'. Detached cottages were added in the 1880s and a nurses' home and new ward, designed by Public Works Department architect Percy Everett, were added in 1936.

In association with the asylum, a substantial area to the south-east of the main complex, was set aside for farming activities. A range of work was undertaken by the patients at Mayday Hills Hospital, a great deal of which appears to have been on the farm and in the garden. The role of productive work as meaningful employment was considered to be therapeutic in the treatment of the mentally unwell. Many of the buildings erected were built using asylum labour with local materials often being used. The large hay and straw shed for example was erected on farmland using local materials and asylum labour. A variety of buildings were included in this complex, including stables (1873), barn, piggeries (including 1879 building), fowl houses (including 1909 building), silos (including 1906), farm workers' quarters, hay and straw sheds. By 1893 an extensive list of vegetables and other crops were produced on the farm at the asylum.

A small farm building of unknown date is located to the east of the farm complex. It is of earth construction with covering structure of corrugated iron. Although its original use is not clear, it was probably constructed as a cool room, possibly a dairy. If this use is correct, the building may have been constructed c1880, after the construction of more pigsties in 1879. The raising of pigs and dairying were compatible industries as the dairy waste (whey and skim milk) was fed to the pigs. It would appear that the function of the building has been changed over time. If initially constructed for use as a cool room, it may have since been used as a smoke room and /or a chicken pen.

Mayday Hills Hospital closed in 1995 and the complex operated as a campus of La Trobe University until 2011. Various community and commercial organisations occupied parts of the site at this time. The university campus was closed in 2011 and the site sold to a private owner.

#### KEY REFERENCES USED TO PREPARE ASSESSMENT

D Kemp. 'Report on the Cob Dairy at Mayday Hills Beechworth', 2015

Lovell Chen. 'Former Mayday Hills Hospital Conservation Management Plan Review', 2012

Miles Lewis, 'Australian Building: a Cultural Investigation' at <http://www.mileslewis.net/research-database.html>

Emails from Colin Gladstone, providing details of reconstruction work in c1980s, dated 2 August 2015 & 12 August 2015

### **Assessment Against Criteria**

#### Criterion

Mayday Hills Hospital is of historical, architectural, technical and aesthetic significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criteria for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

#### Criterion A

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### **Extent of Registration**

#### NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 1995**, I give notice under section 46 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by modifying the following places in the Heritage Register:

Number: H1189  
Category: Heritage Place  
Place: Mayday Hills Hospital  
Albert Road  
Beechworth  
Indigo Shire

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 1189 encompassing all of Lots 1, R1 and Res 1 and part of Lot 2 on Plan of Subdivision 722238.

Dated 11 February 2016

TIM SMITH  
Executive Director

[Victoria Government Gazette G 6 11 February 2016 p.203]

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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 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/>*