

## PUBLIC BUILDINGS PRECINCT – HO273

### Introduction

This Heritage Citation for the Public Buildings Precinct documents the historical background of the Precinct and presents an assessment of heritage significance.

This Citation identifies properties based on their contribution to the heritage values of the Precinct:

- ‘Significant’ heritage places are individually important places of State or local heritage significance. They are listed individually in the Glenelg Shire Planning Scheme Schedule to the Heritage Overlay. They can also be places that, when combined within a precinct, form an important part of the heritage significance of the precinct.
- ‘Contributory’ heritage places are places that contribute to the heritage significance of a precinct. They are not considered to be individually important places of heritage significance, however when combined with other ‘significant’ and/or ‘contributory’ heritage places, they play an integral role in demonstrating the heritage significance of a precinct.
- ‘Non-contributory’ places are places within a heritage precinct that have no identifiable heritage significance. They are included within a Heritage Overlay because any development of the place may impact on the heritage significance of the precinct or adjacent ‘significant’ or ‘contributory’ heritage places.

### Historical background

The Government survey of 1840 included two Sections, Numbers 28 and 29, which would ultimately become the Government Reserve on which the public buildings were erected (Tyers 1840). A number of public buildings often of a temporary nature were constructed on the reserve, which were later replaced with more permanent bluestone or brick structures (G Stokes 2017). These included Lockup No.1 (1840 of timber slab, dem.c.1850) and a Combined Police Office, Post Office, Customs House (1841 of timber slab, dem.1857).

Many more substantial buildings were established from 1844 but were later demolished including Watch House

No.2 (1844, converted to a gaol 1849, dem.1938); Post Office (1857, dem.1969); Former Telegraph Office, later Public Lands and Harbour Offices (1858, dem.1904); Police Office (1860, dem.1971); Police Officers Quarters (1872, dem.1971); Mounted Police Barracks (1865, dem.1971); Free Library Hall (1897, dem.1971) and Pilots Quarters (1911, rem.1975) (G Stokes 2017).

Each of the public buildings in the Precinct had a distinct function and the relative importance of each at the time of their construction can be seen in the detailing, both in quality and nature (Wilson Sayer 1981).

The Public Buildings Precinct was permanently developed from 1844 and in order of construction the extant buildings are as follows; the Court House (1844-45), the remnant Portland Gaol wall (1844), the Customs House (1849-50), the Watch House (1850, extended to include Keeper’s Quarters 1877 and converted to Police Residence 1925), the Town Hall (1863), the Police Cottage (formerly Gaol Governors Quarters 1872), the former Post Office (1881-2), the Rocket Shed (1886) and Drill Hall, Gun Shed and associated residence (1887). Several of these buildings are evident on FW Birmingham’s survey map of Portland in 1853.

Significantly, the Court House is the only surviving example of a stone building erected during architect James Rattenbury’s time as Port Phillip Clerk of Public Works. The Customs House and the Watch House were designed by his successor, Clerk of Works, Henry Ginn.

The Court House (originally a Police Office) and the Portland Gaol were the first substantial buildings constructed (under the same contract) within the Precinct in 1844-45. The first Police Magistrate was James Blair, a prominent Portland citizen. The Portland Gaol was a significant engineering feat for its time, with a large underground tunnel constructed to drain wastewater from the Gaol to the foreshore. Parts of this tunnel remain intact beneath the Precinct, and the tunnel outlet to the foreshore is still visible.

In 1849 work began on the Customs House, followed shortly after by the Watch House, completed in 1850. After its use as a Watch House the building became a Police residence (Bennett 1993).

Over the next 25 years until 1886, the remaining public buildings were constructed in the Precinct, namely the Town Hall (1863), the Gaol Governors Quarters (1872), the former Post Office (1881) and the Rocket Shed (1886).

From the 1970s several new buildings have been constructed in the Precinct, which are not considered contributory and in many ways detract from the aesthetic significance of the Precinct.

However, in the 1980s, a new Municipal Building was designed by Pels, Innes, Neilson and Kosloft Pty Ltd and constructed at the centre of the Precinct. Its distinctive style and low-lying form differentiate it from the older architecture and ensure that the Precinct maintains its original administrative function.

The Precinct includes a memorial triangle in the forecourt of the Municipal Building overlooking Portland Bay. This memorial area includes war memorials, a Pioneer Women's Memorial, and a seat dedicated to Vida Goldstein. The seat commemorates Vida Goldstein (1869-1949), a Victorian social reformer who was born in Portland. Introduced into the fight for women's suffrage by her mother, Vida Goldstein took an early interest in politics. In 1903 she became the first woman in the British Empire to stand for election to a National parliament. Her bid for a Senate seat failed, but she continued to fight for women's suffrage, women's rights and social justice (Monument Australia 2007).

The memorial triangle area also includes a 68 pounder gun (cannon) which was cast at the Low Moor Foundry in England in 1861, and purchased in response to a 1863 British military report which recommended that nineteen guns be bought for the defence of Hobson's Bay. It is not known when the gun was brought to Portland, but it probably arrived in the late 1860s or the 1870s and was used for training purposes (VHD 2011).

The Drill Hall and Gun Shed (1887) on Bentinck Street are an important part of the Precinct. The Drill Hall is a large timber hall with a gun shed attached at the rear north-west corner, built for the recruitment and training of the local volunteer militia. It was designed by the Public Works Department architect, Samuel Bindley, and built in 1887 by G & A Findlay (VHD nd).

The south-eastern portion of the Public Buildings Precinct comprises a vacant block of grassed land, sloping down to the intersection of Cliff and Glenelg Streets. This block, referred to as the Almond Tree Reserve, is all that remains of the former site of the Portland Immigration Depot which was built in 1852-53, to house newly arrived immigrants to Portland. The depot buildings were removed or relocated and the land was subdivided in 1886. The weatherboard houses at 61 and 65 Cliff Street post-date this subdivision.

### Physical description

The Public Buildings Precinct is a large triangular area bounded by Bentinck, Cliff and Glenelg Streets, Portland. The landscape is gradually sloping from a high point near the Court House and the former Town Hall north east to a low point along Cliff Street. The Precinct includes all of the early Colonial government administration buildings extant within Portland.

The best views of the Public Buildings Precinct are from Cliff Street, and from this vantage point the Precinct is framed by the large Norfolk Island Pines (*Araucaria heterophylla*) planted in the road reserve along Cliff Street.

### Comparative analysis

The Public Buildings Precinct can be compared to the Beechworth Justice Precinct (VHR H1464 / HO47 Indigo Shire) in many ways. Both precincts were intensively developed over a relatively short time period and buildings were constructed using locally available stone (honey-coloured granite in Beechworth and bluestone in Portland), and both precincts include a Court House and Police facilities. The Beechworth Justice Precinct has historical and architectural (creative/technical/aesthetic) significance and there is significant potential for archaeological research and investigation at the site.

Regionally, comparisons can be made with the Gipps Street and Moyne River Precinct in Port Fairy (Moyne Shire), which although a much larger extent and inclusive of residential and industrial buildings as well as administrative and legal ones, has many similarities to the Public Buildings Precinct. Both precincts include a Customs House, a Court House, Police residence and facilities and remnants of an early gaol. Both Precincts can be identified by adjacent avenues of Norfolk Island Pines. The Gipps Street and Moyne River Precinct is of historical, architectural, social and scientific significance to the Moyne Shire.

### What is significant?

The Public Buildings Precinct, including the large triangular parcel of land bounded by Bentinck, Cliff and Glenelg Streets is significant to the Glenelg Shire.

Contributory elements to the heritage significance of the Precinct include:

- Colonial Georgian-style bluestone public building architecture, as evidenced by the former Town Hall, the Court House, the Police Cottage, the Rocket Shed, and the Customs House.

- The earliest collection of pre-Separation (July 1851) public buildings in Victoria. In particular the Customs House, the Watch House, the Court House and the remnant wall of the former Portland Gaol, all pre-date Separation of Victoria from New South Wales.
- Remnants of the wall around the former Portland Gaol, which provide an indication of the location and scale of the Gaol and its perimeter wall.
- The former Post Office at 36 Bentinck Street and views to and from it, from vantage points at Bentinck Street, the foreshore and Portland Bay.
- The Drill Hall and Gun Shed on Bentinck Street.
- The Glenelg Shire Council Municipal Building, constructed in 1981, located at the centre of the Public Buildings Precinct, fits well within the landscape. Its low form and circular shape, with a square building added to the south western side, orients it within the Precinct and presents a modern interpretation of the public buildings in Portland.
- Associations with early Port Phillip Clerks of Public Works including James Rattenbury (designed the Court House) and Henry Ginn (designed the Watch House and Town Hall).
- Associations with prominent builders and stone masons including William Robb (mason), John Hughes (mason), Henry Deacon (brickmaker) and Alexander Grant (builder).
- The Rocket Shed (1886) and its associations with maritime rescue in Portland. The Rocket Shed stored the rockets used to launch heavy ropes from one ship to another in heavy seas (Bennett 1993). This provides an evocation of the nature of the elements and survival in seafaring life in Portland.
- The houses at 61 and 65 Cliff Street, although private residences, contribute to the heritage significance of the Precinct as they present a similar style of late Victorian (1890s-1910) weatherboard seaside residences. Their single storey form enhances the form and layout of the overall Precinct.
- Potential archaeological sites associated with buildings which are no longer present within the Precinct, including the Immigration Depot, Lockup No. 1, Combined Government Office/Telegraph Station, the Portland Gaol and the Gaol wall. Although extensive clearance was undertaken for the construction of the Municipal building in 1980-81, archaeological potential still exists outside this area.
- Views from the Precinct to Portland Bay and views of the Precinct from the foreshore and from Cliff Street.

### How is it significant?

The Public Buildings Precinct is of historical significance (HERCON Criterion A), is rare (HERCON Criterion B), has research significance (HERCON Criterion C), aesthetic significance (HERCON Criterion E), associative significance (HERCON Criterion G) and creative/technical significance (HERCON Criterion F) to the Glenelg Shire.

### Why is it significant?

The Public Buildings Precinct is historically significant (HERCON Criterion A) to the Glenelg Shire for its historical and continued use as the administration centre of Portland. Collectively the buildings within the Precinct are also of historical significance to the Glenelg Shire, and Victoria, as one of the oldest surviving examples of a group of pre-Separation government administrative buildings in Victoria. The Court House and Customs House pre-date comparative buildings in Port Fairy.

The Public Buildings Precinct has significance to the Glenelg Shire for the way it demonstrates rare aspects of cultural history in the south west of Victoria. These buildings, particularly the judicial and policing buildings were constructed in response to an urgent perceived need for law and order in a region considered outside the control of the Port Phillip administration in the 1840s.

The Public Buildings Precinct has research significance to the Glenelg Shire for its archaeological potential and architectural techniques demonstrated in construction.

The Public Buildings Precinct is of aesthetic significance to the Glenelg Shire, in particular due to the dramatic colonial Georgian-style buildings such as the Court House, the Customs House and the former Town Hall which present a reminder of the struggles in law and order and administration in the early settlement of Portland. The size, location in the landscape and architectural detail of each of these buildings provides an indication of the relative importance of each and its original function. Similarly the row of Norfolk Island Pines along the north east side of Cliff Street presents a strong, dramatic definition to the Public Buildings Precinct.

The Public Buildings Precinct is of associative significance to the Glenelg Shire for its special associations with the technical and architectural works of important individuals in Portland's and Victoria's history, including early Port Phillip Clerks of Public Works James Rattenbury (designed the Court House) and Henry Ginn (designed the Watch House and Town Hall), and prominent builders and stone masons including William

Robb, John Hughes, Henry Deacon and Alexander Grant.

The Public Buildings Precinct is of creative and technical significance to the Glenelg Shire, as its buildings represent one of the earliest collections of public, judicial and administrative buildings in Victoria. The technical challenges in building these bluestone buildings, out of locally available stone, in a remote area, are demonstrated in their austere Georgian style.

### Photographs



The Court House (1844-45) 67 Cliff Street (significant)



Detail from the original plans for the Portland Town Hall, drawn by Alexander Ross in 1862. (Source: Glenelg Shire Council Cultural Collection)



Former Portland Town Hall (1863), 75 Cliff Street (significant)



The Rocket Shed (1886), 81 Cliff Street, (significant)



The Customs House (1849-50), 95 Cliff Street, (significant)



The Police Cottage, 1 Blair Street (1872) (significant)



The former Portland Gaol (1844), viewed from corner of Glenelg and Bligh Streets. (Source: Portland Historical Society).



Remnant Portland Gaol wall, 2 Glenelg Street (1844) (significant)  
(source: Glenelg Shire Council)



Former Watch House, (1850) 85 Cliff Street. Portico and columns at entrance are a later addition and not significant (significant)



Glenelg Shire Council Municipal building (contributory), shortly after construction and its location next to the former Portland Town Hall (significant). The 1970s library building (non-contributory) is behind the Town Hall (Source: State Library of Victoria, JT Collins Collection)



Vida Goldstein Memorial Seat (by Carmel Wallace 2007) (contributory)



Glenelg Shire Council Municipal Building, 71 Cliff Street (contributory)



Pioneer Women's Memorial (1935) (contributory)

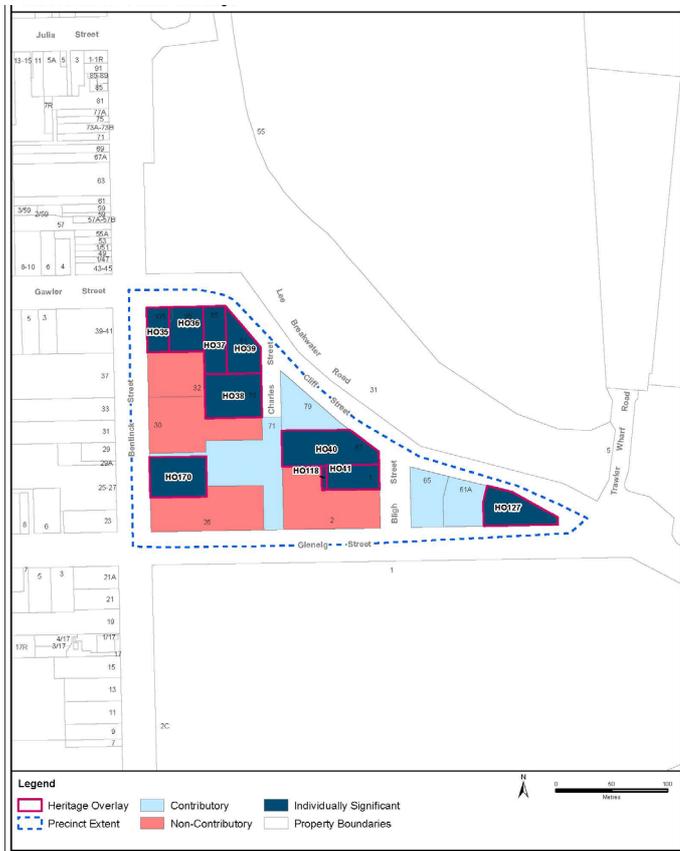


Gun (68 Pounder) in Memorial triangle in forecourt of the Municipal building. (contributory)



Drill Hall and Gun Shed on Bentinck Street (significant)

**Public Buildings Precinct Map**



**Contributory Places**

- 61 Cliff Street (House)
- 65 Cliff Street (House)
- 71 Cliff Street (Glenelg Shire Council Municipal Building)
- 79 Cliff Street (War Memorials)
- 79 Cliff Street (Pioneer Women’s Memorial)
- 79 Cliff Street (Vida Goldstein Memorial Seat)
- 79 Cliff Street (Cannon)

**Significant Places**

- 26 Bentinck Street (Drill Hall and Gun Shed)
- 36 Bentinck Street (Former Post Office)
- 1 Bligh Street (Police Cottage)
- 67 Cliff Street (Court House)
- 75 Cliff Street (Former Town Hall)
- 81 Cliff Street (Rocket Shed)
- 85 Cliff Street (Former Watch House)
- 95 Cliff Street (Customs House)
- Corner Cliff and Glenelg Streets (Almond Tree Reserve)
- 2 Glenelg Street, rear of Court House (Wall, former gaol)

### Recommended Controls (2016)

External Paint Controls	Yes
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	Yes
Fences & Outbuildings	Yes
Prohibited Uses May Be Permitted	No
Incorporated Plan	No
Aboriginal Heritage Place	No

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This information is provided for guidance only and does not supersede official documents, particularly the planning scheme. Planning controls should be verified by checking the relevant municipal planning scheme.