

WASC 502

On Her Majesty's Service

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*The Beechworth Powder Magazine.
Victoria, Australia.*

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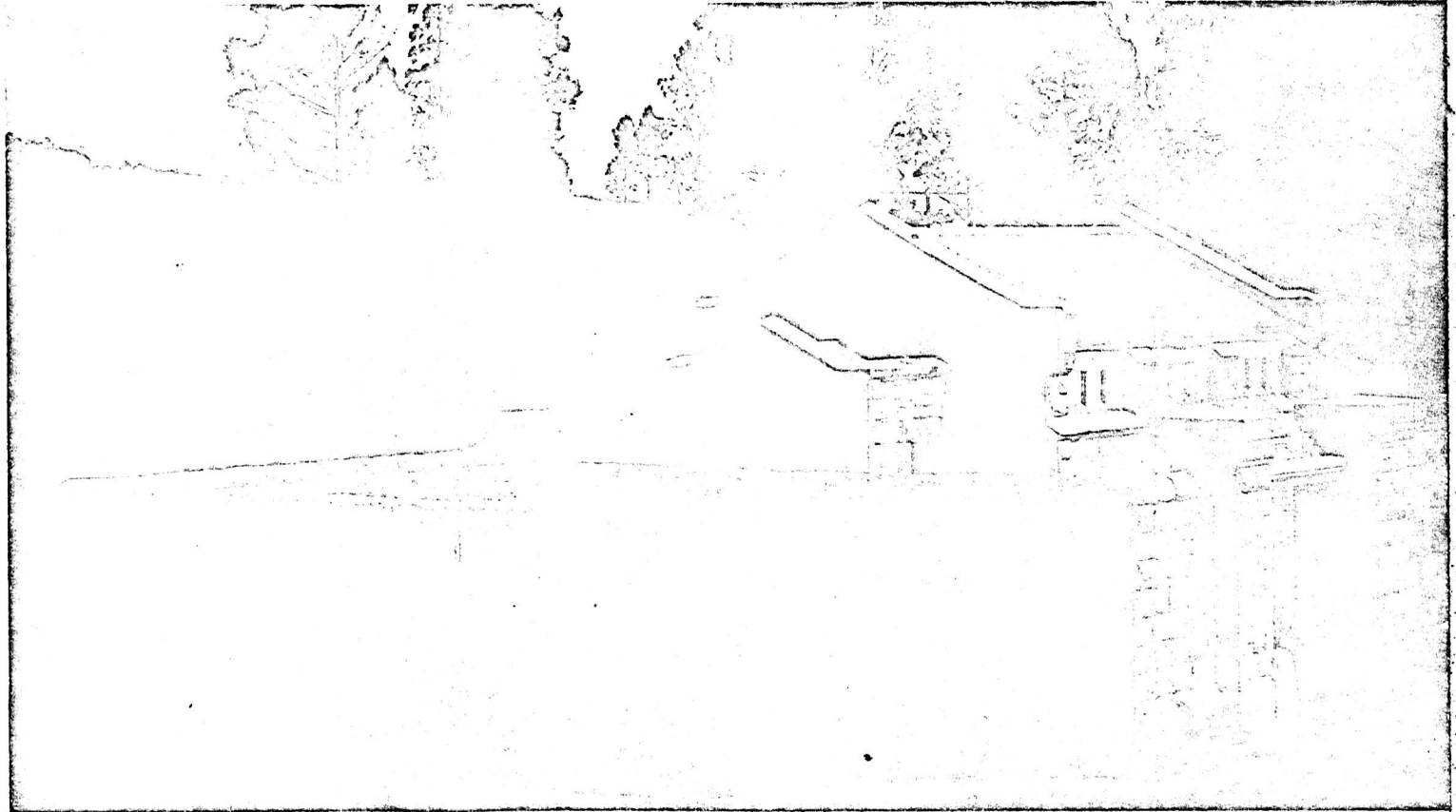
THE National Trust of Australia (Victoria) aims to preserve lands and buildings of beauty or of architectural, historic or scenic interest, and to protect the flora and fauna of Victoria.

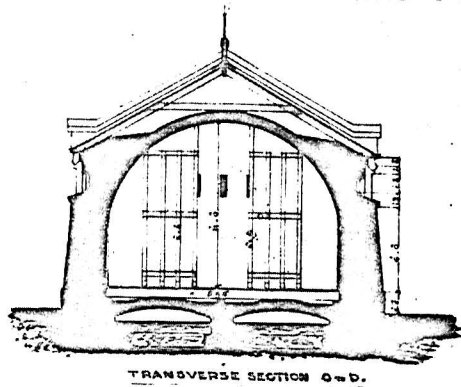
The Trust is a non-government organization, basically financed by gifts, legacies and members' subscriptions.

Regional branches of the Trust have been established at Ballarat, Hamilton, and Bendigo, and further branches are planned.

You can help by becoming a Member of the National Trust and by persuading your friends to do so. This will accelerate the essential work that the Trust is doing.

BEECHWORTH





Plan by courtesy Dept. of Public Works, Melbourne

Transverse Section C to D, Powder Magazine proposed to be built at Portland, February 1858. A replica of the Beechworth Powder Magazine, but for being six inches longer, this Portland magazine was not built. The plans were used in the Beechworth restoration.

opposite
Side Elevation, proposed
Portland Powder Magazine

Classified A

Of national importance, to be preserved at all costs—the Beechworth Powder Magazine is one of the most important gold era relics intact in Australia.

Neglected for many years, the building was derelict until local residents, inspired by Mr Jack Skidmore and the Progress Association, raised funds for urgent restoration work. Restoration was continued by voluntary labour from Melbourne, led by Mr Frank Strahan. There was strong support from the North Eastern Historical Society, and its president Mr Dudley Sheppard.

In 1965 the project was formally adopted by the National Trust, and completed following a general appeal. Mr John Murphy, of Melbourne, acted as honorary architect.

Local enthusiasm and support from the Shire Council of Beechworth, particularly the Shire President Mr J. J. Macaulay, and the Shire Engineer, Mr R. A. Walls, enabled the project to proceed with remarkable speed. The Trust is indebted to the numerous local citizens who made this important project possible.

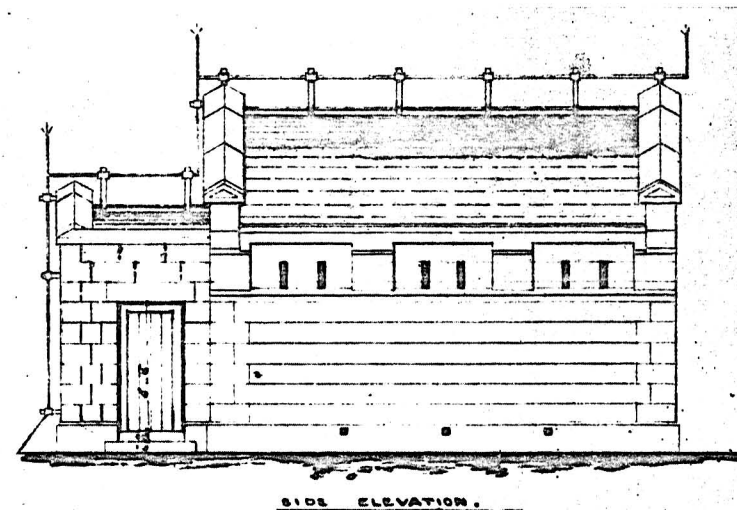
The Trust hopes to be associated with local citizens in the preservation of more of the many outstanding buildings in this delightful and historic town.

Como, South Yarra

April 1966

Chairman

National Trust of Australia (Victoria)



The Building's Origin

Beechworth's powder magazine was one of several government magazines built on the Victorian goldfields towards the end of the 1850s. They owed their origin to the changing character of gold mining at the time: as surface diggings became exhausted miners turned to deep alluvial and quartz deposits. The new form of mining used large amounts of gunpowder for blasting and this required extensive storage facilities close to the mines. In the public interest the Victorian government introduced in 1857 'An Act to Regulate the Importation, Carriage and Custody of Gunpowder', which provided for the establishment of public powder magazines to be financed by the Treasury and administered locally. Any person bringing more than 100 lbs of gunpowder into a district served by such a magazine was required to keep it there until needed and pay a small rent for the storage.

In February 1858, shortly after the passage of this Act, the Beechworth Council asked the Victorian government to build a powder magazine at Beechworth. The request was granted and £1,500 allocated for its erection. In 1859 the Melbourne builders, T. Dawson and Co., constructed the magazine itself at a cost of £697. 7s. 0d. In the following year another Melbourne firm, Atchison and Lumsden, built the boundary wall at a cost of £807. 13s. 0d. The magazine opened for business when the first Keeper took up his duties on 1 September 1860.

First Keepers

The post as Keeper of the Powder Magazine, though bearing heavy responsibilities, was a part-time job only, since the magazine was used irregularly and opened only on request. The position was first held by John B. Castieau, Governor of the Beechworth Gaol. When Castieau became Governor of the Melbourne Gaol in 1869 the duty of Keeper fell to the Senior Constable of Beechworth, then from 1882 to the local Mining Warden's Clerk. The last official Keeper of the Powder Magazine was a woman, Miss Kathleen Alderdice.

Safety Precautions

The strictest precautions were taken to minimize the risk of an explosion. The surrounding area was cleared of vegetation in case of bush fire; the magazine itself had an elaborate lightning conductor, and all metal fixtures were made of copper, to eliminate the possibility of sparks igniting the powder. Persons entering the magazine were required to wear special outer clothing and footwear (goloshes or wooden clogs). Coopering tools had to be made of wood or copper, and kegs or cases could only be opened on a special mat at a safe distance from the magazine. Gelignite, which had largely superseded gunpowder by the 1890s, had to be stored separately from the detonators; these were therefore usually kept in private magazines in Beechworth. No vehicles or animals were allowed



• Gable end, prior to restoration, 1965
Photo by Frank Strahan

within the boundary walls of the magazine. If, in spite of all these precautions, an explosion had occurred, then the construction of the building with its arched inner roof and double-arched foundations would have ensured that the blast would go upwards instead of outwards with minimum damage to the neighbourhood.

Decline in Gold

By the early years of the present century the magazine was largely obsolete. Gold mining in the Beechworth district had almost petered out and the small amount of explosive required could be more conveniently stored at the smaller private magazines in Beechworth itself. Other public magazines in Victoria were in much the same position. Their closure, however, was delayed in view of their potential military value, and it was not until 31 March 1918 that the Beechworth powder magazine, along with four other government magazines, finally closed.

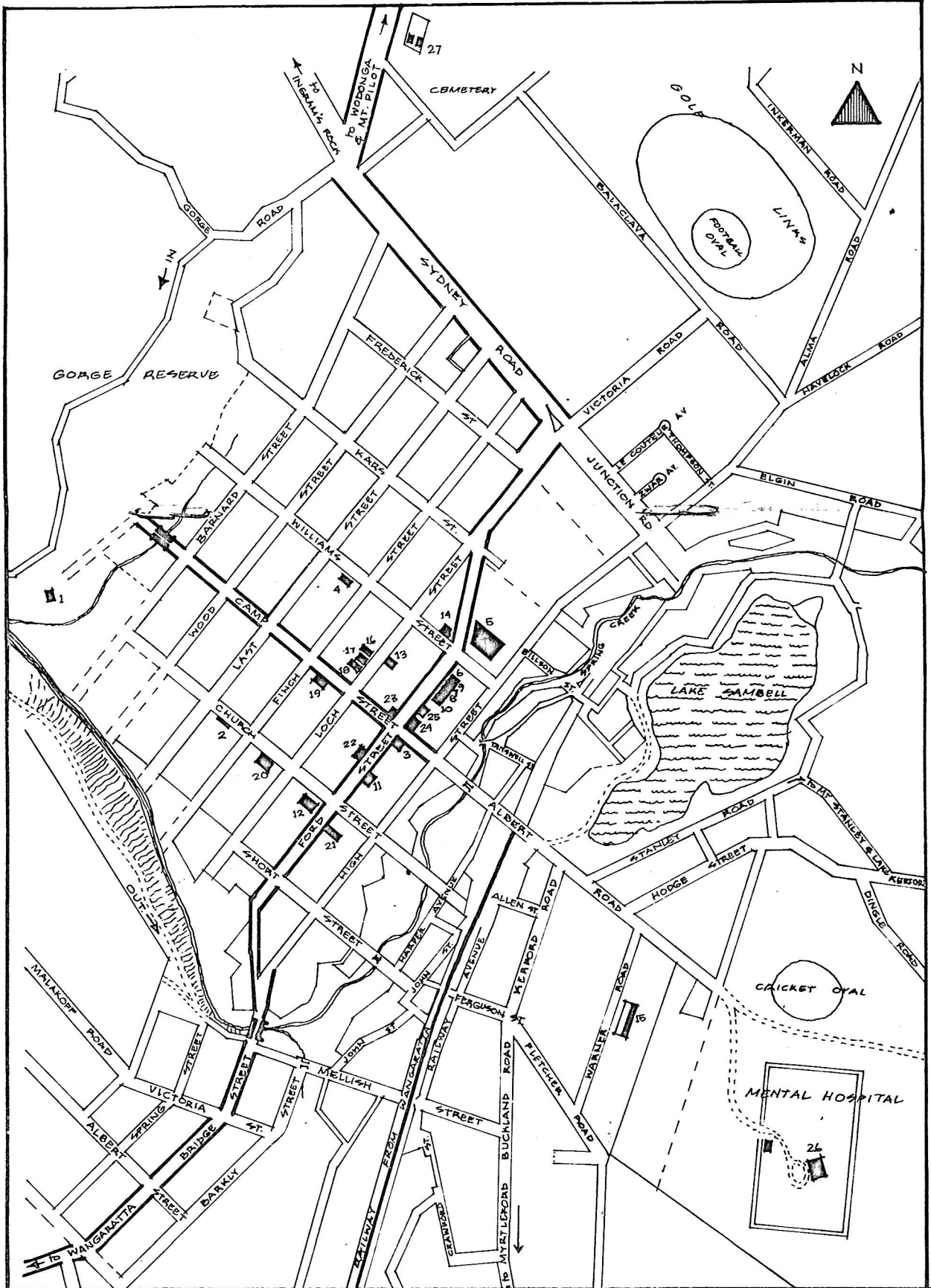
E. A. Beever

BEECHWORTH

showing buildings classified by the National Trust

Twenty-two miles east of Wangaratta, Beechworth is close to the Hume Highway, and on a direct route to Canberra, via Albury.

The key to the map is on the following pages.



National Trust Classifications

Beechworth

DEFINITIONS

Class A: Of national importance. To be preserved at all costs.

Class B: Highly significant. To be preserved.

Class C: Notable. Also worthy of preservation.

Class D: Interesting. Preservation desirable.

* Buildings marked with an asterisk together form an A group. Numbers refer to position on map opposite.

- 1 *Powder Magazine*: 1859-60. (A)
- 2 *Old Hospital Facade*: 1862-4. The facade was left standing when the hospital was demolished in 1940. (B)
- 3 *Former Bank*: 1858. Originally Bank of Victoria; later CBC of Sydney. Now private residence. (B)
- 4 *House*: (two storey) modernized since classification. (B)
- 5 **Gaol*: 1859-61. Extensions in 1925. (B)
- 6 **Forestry Office*: (left-hand building) 1859-60. Originally police building. (B)
- 7 **Police Station*: 1857-8. Originally sub-treasury and gold office. (B)
- 8 **Court House*: 1858. Additions in 1865. (B)
- 9 **Forestry Office*: (right-hand building) 1859-60. Originally police building. (C)
- 10 **Lands Office*: 1858. Originally telegraph office. (C)
- 11 *Tanswell's Commercial Hotel*: date unknown. (C)
- 12 *Christ Church*: 1858-9. Tower and chancel, 1864. (C)
- 13 *Library and Museum*: Library section, originally Athenaeum Hall, 1857. Museum added 1863; final additions 1874. (C)
- 14 *St Andrew's Church*: 1857. (C)
- 15 *Ovens and Murray Home*: 1862-3. Extensions 1867 and 1890. (C)
- 16 *Masonic Temple*: 1858. Front portion added since classification. (D)
- 17 *Office of Ovens and Murray Advertiser*: 1865. Originally the public school; in 1875 Beechworth Grammar School; in 1891 taken over by the Advertiser. (D)
- 18 *Congregational Church Hall*: 1858. Originally used as church. (D)
- 19 *Former Hotel*: Date unknown. (D)
- 20 *Roman Catholic Church*: 1868-1872.
- 21 *Methodist Church*: 1856-7. (D)
- 22 *Former Hotel*: The Star. The present two story building replaced the original hotel built in 1852, which was destroyed by fire. (D)
- 23 *Bank of New South Wales*: 1858. (D)
- 24 *Post Office*: 1869-70. The present building incorporated the tower and colonnade of the 1858 building, which had been destroyed by fire in 1867. The balcony was added in 1874, and the stone building later faced with cement. (D)
- 25 *Former Bank*: Now Murray Breweries offices. (D)
- 26 *Mental Hospital and Lodge*: 1865-7. (D)

Object of interest:

- 27 *Chinese Ceremonial Burning Towers*, in the Chinese section of the cemetery.

The Beechworth Rush

Beechworth was founded early in 1852 when a prospecting party, following the advice of a shepherd, discovered gold at Spring Creek. Within a few weeks the tranquil valley and ancient hills, then part of the pastoral holdings of David Reid and known as May Day Hills, were being assaulted by eager miners. By December there were several thousand men on the field. William Howitt, arriving in that month, saw

huts, dusty ground, all trodden, trees felled and withering in the sun, with all their foliage; here and there a round hole like a well, a few feet deep, where they have been trying for gold but have not found it . . . lean horses grazing about on a sward that a goose could not lay hold of . . . washes hanging out; . . . horrid stench from butchers' shops: . . . (and) along the valley to the right, green smooth sward, and nothing to indicate that there is gold here more than in a thousand other places.

Similar scenes followed discoveries at Pennyweight Flat and Reid's Creek in the same year, and later on numerous other fields nearby.

Growth of a Town

Hard on the heels of the miners came the forces of law and order: two commissioners, ten troopers and a party of foot police had been despatched immediately by Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe, and before the end of 1852 a Methodist lay preacher had delivered his first sermons. In 1853 the first gaol was built on the site of the present police reserve; a post office was established and, at the request of the leading storekeepers, the settlement was surveyed. In that year the town was named Beechworth. The years following saw the rapid proliferation of stores and hotels, the establishment of the *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* in 1855, plans for the first hospital in 1856, and, in the same year, the first Council elections. Regular church services were established by all of the major denominations. But the town was still 'in an unfurnished state': the erection of canvas shops and dwellings had only recently been forbidden; roads were unmade; and there were few buildings of impressive size and permanence.

Yet in 1857 William Kelly wrote with admiration of Beechworth

' . . . (standing) proudly the thriving centre of a busy, prosperous community, numbering close on twenty thousand souls, with numerous churches, banks, grand stores, and spacious hotels, boasting also a splendid hospital, two ably conducted journals and town allotments selling at £60 the foot.'

In that year contracts had been let for the sub-treasury, police offices, gaol and Athenaeum Hall; and the new Council had established the first town water supply, constructed roads, and laid out the Chinese Camp. A year later Kelly would have seen the first stone post office, the court house, the telegraph office and the first stage of the Anglican church. By

1859 Beechworth had built many of its finest buildings, and the completion of the powder magazine in 1860 added further distinction to the town.

Development continued at a quieter pace during the 1860s. Lake Kerferd was formed in 1862, but there were many legal and financial difficulties to be overcome before its water was finally reticulated to the town in 1874. In 1863 the Museum was built on to the Athenaeum Hall; in 1869 the post office was rebuilt following a disastrous fire in 1867 which wiped out one side of Camp Street; and in 1868 construction of the Roman Catholic church began. Perhaps the most important events of these years, however, were the opening of the Ovens and Murray Home in 1863 and of the Beechworth Mental Hospital in 1867, for these two institutions have helped to keep the town alive.

Later Years

Beechworth in the 1870s was a solid town, proud of its several bands; of its new school built in 1875; of the Newtown Bridge and the gas works completed in the same year; and of the railway which reached the town in 1876. Excitement was provided by the activities of the Kelly gang, reaching its highest point with the preliminary trial of Ned Kelly in the local court in 1880. But with the final decline of the goldfields population dwindled rapidly, until in 1888 there were said to be only 2,500 people in the town. Today the population is 3,700. Many buildings have fallen into disrepair, but Beechworth remains a beautiful town—a monument to the enthusiasm of the gold era, to the pride and ambition of its early residents. Beechworth is now a National Trust project.

Ford St, Beechworth, 1966

Photo by Noel C. Elliston

