A GOLDFIELDS PALACE

Bendigo Town Hall has been described as one of the most remarkable boom time buildings in Victoria. It has a stunning interior featuring elaborate plasterwork and extensive hand painted decoration. But by the late 20th century the building was tired and under-used. In 2000 the City of Greater Bendigo embarked on a major restoration program. On 14 January 2000 the Minister for Planning, John Thwaites, announced a grant of $940,000 for internal restoration works and render repairs from the Department of Infrastructure's Public Heritage Program, administered by Heritage Victoria. The total cost of the restoration is $3 million with the City of Greater Bendigo providing $2,030,000 and a further $30,000 from private sponsorship.

Year	Event
1851	Gold discovered in Bendigo
1854	German-born W. C. Vahland arrived in the colony
1855	Town of Sandhurst (Bendigo) became a municipality
1856	First Town Hall was a small timber building on View Point
1857	Vahland sets up his architectural practice with Robert Getzschmann
1859	A new, two-storey Italianate Town Hall designed by George Fletcher, Town Surveyor, was built
1866-67	Two-storey extension added to the north of the building to house the council chamber
1871-72	Addition of the Corn Exchange comprising two storeys and a basement to the north of the building
1878-87	Major remodelling of the exterior and interior carried out to the designs of architect W. C. Vahland. The work comprised major extensions and the addition of three towers and mansard roof, reconstruction of the main stair, decorative plasterwork by Otto Waschatz (decorated Royal Palace, Copenhagen), and council chamber painted by W. J. Straughair
1902	Painting of the main hall by Coulter and Smith of Bendigo
1913-15	Remodelling of offices
1926	Replacement of main Hargreaves Street hall entrance, foyer and balcony with stage
2000	Restoration works to the Town Hall commence

Heritage
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CITY OF GREATER
BENDIGO

Victoria
The Place To Be

The colour scheme was carefully researched and the applied scheme is based on the original colours of the main hall.

Golden legacy

There are many palaces in the Golden City of Bendigo but few are finer than the Town Hall – a building that is today a symbol of the enterprise, energy, and pride of its community.

Gold was first found at Bendigo in 1851. The alluvial field was perhaps the richest ever known. When the shallow gold ran out, the permanence of the town was assured by deep quartz reefs that yielded some 22 million ounces of gold over the next 100 years.

Among the thousands who lugged a pick and shovel to Bendigo in the 1850s was a young architect from Germany, William Vahland (1828–1915). With no luck at the diggings, and no demand for architects in a shanty town, he initially worked as a carpenter making wooden cradles for miners until setting up as an architect in 1857.

In 1855 the town of Sandhurst, as Bendigo was then called, became a municipality. The first Town Hall was a rough, two-roomed building at View Point. In 1859 the Town Surveyor, George Fletcher, was appointed to design a Town Hall in controversial circumstances. Fletcher's Town Hall was a red brick Italianate building with a corrugated iron roof. Cramped, unsightly, and soon in danger of collapse, it was far from respectable when the town became a city in 1871.

When Fletcher's design for a two-storey, plain-brick Corn Exchange was incorporated into the building in 1871–72, so ugly and useless was the 'brick kiln', as locals dubbed the structure, that Vahland was asked to prepare plans.
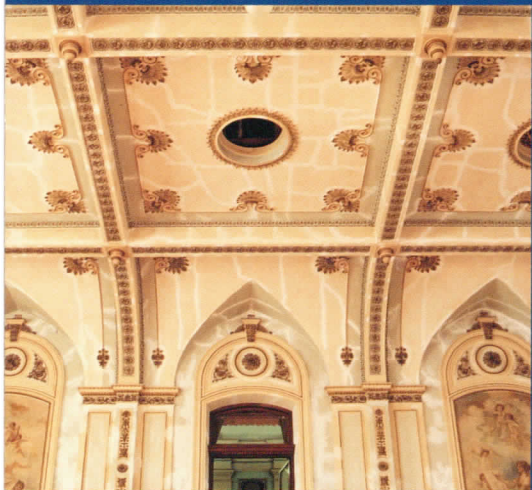
In a series of major works between 1878 and 1902, Vahland's designs transformed the Town Hall. The main hall and council chambers were enlarged; a superb interior decorative scheme was introduced; and a clock tower, mansard roof, and elaborate classical facades endowed the building with a style and character that suitably expressed the exuberance and splendour of Bendigo's golden age.

Later generations have sometimes failed to appreciate the value of the Town Hall. In 1936 the interior was threatened by a proposal for its conversion to a cinema. The building was unsuccessfully offered for sale to the Public Works Department in 1973, and demolition was narrowly averted in the early 1970s.

The Town Hall project has already brought benefits to Bendigo through the employment and promotion of specialist skills. After its completion, further benefits will flow through to the community including increased patronage, greater income earning capacity and reduced maintenance costs. It is fitting that in 2001, during the 150th anniversary of the discovery of gold in Victoria, the restoration of Bendigo Town Hall ensures the glory of our past remains alive.

All fine cracks had to be repaired before works could proceed to Stage 3.

An issue of rising damp had to be addressed before any interior works could start. The first stage of the project started in the basement and involved the installation of a damp proof course.

The damp proof course was chemically injected in all basement walls and around the perimeter of the building.

CONSERVATION WORKS

The overall project is divided into five separate stages.

Stage No.	Description	Status	Cost	Contractor
Stage 1	Damp proofing of the basement	Completed	Approx. $180,000	Quettar
Stage 2	Balcony reinstatement, repair of the decorative elements and installation of stairs	Completed	Approx. $480,000	Consortium made of R.L.Tweedly (builder form Bendigo), Quettar (Bendigo) and Westlegate (plasterer, Sydney)
Stage 3	Reinstatement of original decorative scheme and conservation of art work	Completed	Approx. $340,000	Watson and Cahill (painters, Bendigo) and Barbara Schafer (artwork stencils and gold leaf, Melbourne)
Stage 4	Installation of services and refurbishment of the Lyttleton Terrace end of the building	Completed	$2.1 million	Morey & Hurford Pty Ltd
Stage 5	Refurbishment of the council chambers	Commencement 2003-2004		To be confirmed

Initial works at the Town Hall, including roofing repairs and damp proofing, ensured that the building structure was sound before proceeding with the major conservation works. It was essential that the problem of rising damp be tackled before the restoration of the plasterwork was tackled.

The major conservation works began with the reinstatement of the Hargreaves Street entrance, foyer and balcony, involving demolition of the 1926 stage and proscenium arch.

The reinstatement of the original balcony involved the erection of the supporting brick wall removed in 1926. The wall was modelled on photographic evidence.

Missing decorative pieces were modelled in situ using silicon forms. The decorative scheme was copied from surviving elements in the hall. Existing damaged elements were carefully repaired. Elaborate stucco ornaments were modelled in situ.
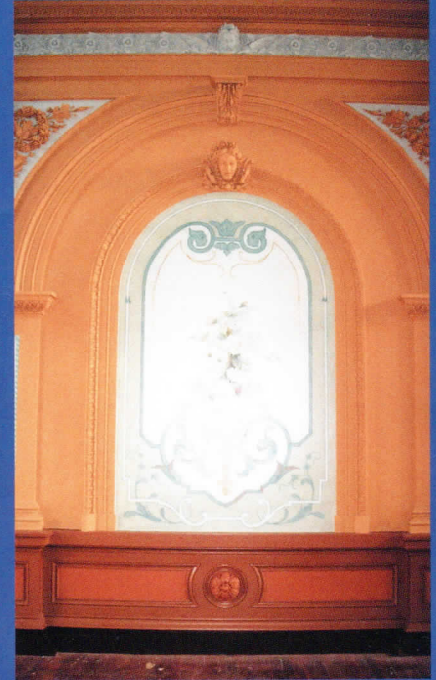
The decorative elements of the main hall had suffered considerable damage through wear and tear as well as inappropriate installation of services.

The stencilling and gold leaf application requires a great deal of patience and skill but the outcome is well worth the effort. As the existing stencilling is retouched rather then reapplied, colour matching becomes an art form in its own right.

The restoration of the original decorative scheme and conservation of the extensive artwork was completed in 2003. This included the reinstatement of the original paint scheme and applying gold leaf to the decorative work.

The Town Hall restoration has provided work for local and other firms with specialist skills. It has also given students from the Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE the chance to gain firsthand knowledge about skills and techniques that will help them in their future careers as plasterers, painters and decorators.

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Tours of the

Bendigo Town Hall

are conducted by

Bendigo Tourism

twice weekly.

Contact Bendigo Tourism

on 1800 813 153

for further assistance.

Photographs courtesy of Westox Pty Ltd and the City of Greater Bendigo.

THE HISTORY OF THE BENDIGO TOWN HALL

The Bendigo Town Hall is a building of national significance listed on both the Register of the National Estate and the Victorian Heritage Register.

The original building was designed in 1859 by town clerk George Avery Fletcher. This was followed by a further addition of a council chamber in 1866 and a hall for the trading of grain known as the "corn exchange" was added in 1871-72.

Although the architecture of this addition adhered to that of the original building, the completed building was not liked by the citizens or the council of the day.

In a series of major works between 1878 and 1902 the hall was transformed by renowned architect William C Vahland who was given the task of converting it into something befitting the city of gold.

Vahland commissioned Otto Waschatz who was fresh from decorating the royal palace at Copenhagan to design the town hall interior.

When the work was completed in 1885 the modest building the people of Bendigo had known had been totally transformed.

This work included offices, enlargement of the main hall and council chambers, introduction of a superb interior decorative scheme, construction of a clock tower and mansard roof, and the redecoration of the exterior facades in the classical style.

The end result was Vahland's most remarkable work and the finest boom style building of its type in Victoria.
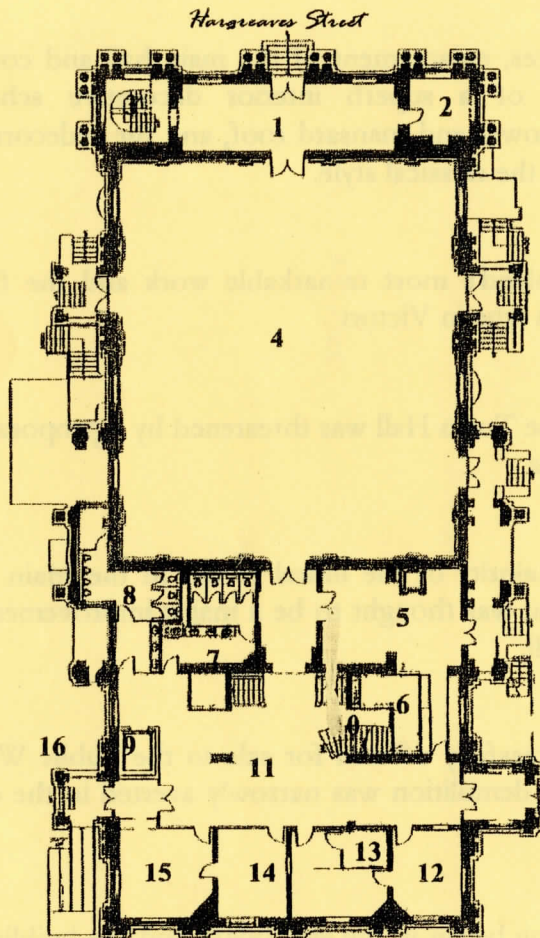
In 1936 the interior of the Town Hall was threatened by a proposal for its conversion to a cinema.

In the late 1950's the majority of the mural panels in the Main Hall were painted over in what was thought to be a major improvement to the look of the Town Hall.

The building was unsuccessfully offered for sale to the Public Works Department in 1973 and demolition was narrowly averted in the early 1970's.

Restoration of the building began in the late 1990's and the building is now available for event bookings through The City of Greater Bendigo on (03) 5434 6000.

Bendigo Town Hall

Hargreaves Street

Ground Floor

Hargreaves Street

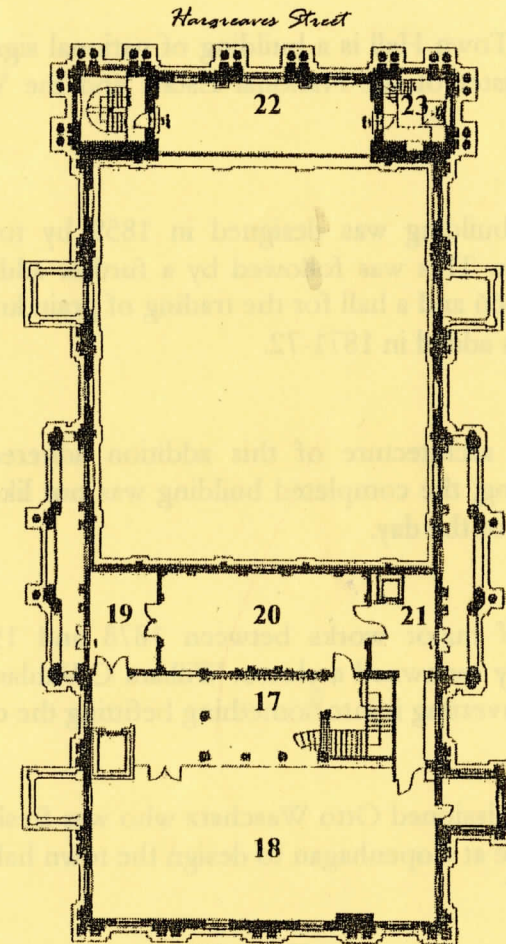**First Floor**

Self Guide Tour

LEGEND

Ground Floor

1. Hargreaves Street, Foyer
2. Technical Control Room (staff only)
3. Stair to balcony
4. Main Hall
5. Kitchen (staff only)
6. Store (staff only)
7. Female Toilets
8. Male Toilets
9. Lift
10. Stairs to First Floor
11. Ground Floor Foyer
12. Meeting Room
13. Accessible Toilet
14. Meeting Room
15. Office (staff only)
16. Access Ramp

First Floor

17. First Floor lobby
18. Function Room (former Police Court)
19. Ante Room
20. Original Council Chamber (still to be restored)
21. Kitchen (staff only)
22. Balcony
23. Clock Tower (staff only)

CITY OF GREATER
BENDIGO

After many years of restoration the historic Bendigo Town Hall was officially reopened on Sunday March 23 2003.
Please keep this sheet as a souvenir of your visit.
For booking enquiries contact the City of Greater Bendigo on 5434 6000