

Significance Assessment

Name of Site:	Rocky Vale Villa
Address:	7 Wicks Road Maiden Gully
Latitude/Longitude:	-36.765871, 144.231573
Building Type:	Private Residence and outbuildings
Dates of Construction:	1873 - 1891 ¹
Current Ownership:	Privately owned
Significance:	Historical Aesthetic (Architectural)
Existing Heritage Status:	Heritage Listed by City of Greater Bendigo



Source: David Fisher – Property Caretaker

Description:

General:

The Rocky Vale Villa is located along the Calder Highway between Bendigo and Maiden Gully. It is set well back from the highway on a large property surrounded by bushland. Other constructions on the property contemporaneous with the Villa are a barn containing the remnants of a blacksmiths, two dams, and a part of the original carriage way. Additions to the property over the years include a windmill and tank, three sheds, a small dairy, chicken sheds, two small brick buildings right behind the Villa and a one story rear addition to the Villa constructed of brick veneer.

The Villa:

The Villa is a two story gothic revival house. It has an L-shaped layout with a tower included at the juncture of the two wings. The exterior of the Villa is sandstone and granite quarried on site.ⁱⁱ The front of the house faces north with the



main entrance located on the eastern face of the tower. Sandstone is the main material used in the external construction. Granite was used as an accent on the face of the house; quoins and skew corbels at the corners of each wall, and each front facing window has granite sills, architraves and frame. The ground and first floor have double-hung sash windows, the north wing attic window is blocked and the tower attic window is another sash window.

Source: Greater city of Bendigo

The house has a hipped roof. The eastern wing roof is gabled while the north wing and the tower are end-gabled, although the current corrugated galvanised steel is not the original. Each wing has coping at the gable ends with a chimney at the apex of the east wing. The tower roof is more steeply pitched than those of the wings. At the apex of both the north and south coping on the tower is a Fleur de Lis finial, with another on the coping of the north wing. A small cartouche is included on the face of the north wing wall reading Rocky Vale Villa.

A small concreted area, enclosed by a short iron fence is located inside the two wings (a later addition likely from the 1950s). In front of this square and the north wing is the remains of the house garden. The garden extends from the face of the house roughly 5-6 metres, and extends around the western side of the house. Also a part of the original house is an intact domed water tank partially underground located in the garden on the western side of the house. One of the two



Source: David Fisher – Property Caretaker

damns is located just east of the house and is lined with stone walls. To the rear of the damn is the original path carriages used to reach the house. The second damn is further to the west of the house.

A brick veneer addition to the rear of the house was made several decades ago. This addition is of poor quality and detracts from the significance of the house, although its removal may cause damage to the exterior sandstone of the original walls.

The interior of the house was renovated in approximately the 1950s. The alterations to the property were considerable but most have been removed in the last few years. No original fixtures, including the marble mantle pieces and benchtops, remain in the house. Some original fixtures have been located on the property but are severely damaged. The only original decoration remaining in the house is plaster ceiling decorations and internal wood decorations above the windows.



Source: David Fisher – Property Caretaker

The kitchen is located at the rear of the house in the east wing on the ground floor. It is a large room with benches on most walls, the original oven is not present and the walls, floor and benches are damaged. The front of the ground floor is a medium sized sitting room which contains the stair case and a small entry way at the front door. This sitting room is at the base of the tower. Another larger room is at the base of the north wing. The original stair case is no longer present. The second floor contains 4 large bedrooms. The house also has a partial cellar consisting of several mud rooms accessible by a staircase off the kitchen.

The house has not been used as a residence for several decades. While current efforts are being made to maintain the property it does require considerable restoration to become habitable.

The Outbuildings:

Of the remaining outbuildings only one is from the original property; a two story barn with a blacksmith's area. The timber frame is original while the roof is not. In the blacksmiths, the original floor brickwork is present; the bricks are trapezoid in shape. The work benches are also still present.



All other buildings are more recent although it is not known precisely when each was built. The two newer sheds in front of the house are attached to the original barn; both made of corrugated steel. To the north of the original barn is a small brick dairy likely less than 50 years old, however it does contain older dairy equipment. The two free standing brick buildings at the rear of the house are a small unit and a single room used for storage. The third shed is a small free standing brick building to the rear of the Villa. The chicken shed have mostly been removed except for the cement base.

Source: Lovell Chen Architects & Heritage Consultants Pty Ltd

The surroundings of the house are very rustic however the house cannot be seen from the road.

History:

Context:

Gold was discovered in Sandhurst in November 1851.ⁱⁱⁱ The population increased exponentially seemingly overnight and the town developed rapidly in support of the influx of prospectors.^{iv} Not unlike other newly established gold mining towns, Sandhurst prized development with the complimentary desires to be seen as both progressive and permanent. These desires presented themselves in the creation of grand buildings made of stone as opposed to the timber and tents that made up the town initially.^v As such the work of stonemasons and architects was highly prized, with architects in particular being credited with the creation of the distinctive style of Sandhurst.^{vi} The Town Hall of Sandhurst began construction in 1882^{vii}, ten years after construction on the Rocky Vale Villa commenced. It was in 1891, the year the Villa was completed, that the town of Sandhurst was officially renamed 'Bendigo'.^{viii}

Property:

The Rocky Vale Villa was designed and built by local stonemason William Beebe Snr. Beebe Snr emigrated from Rutland, England with his wife and baby. He arrived in Port Fairy in 1855 and spent some years moving around eastern Australia. In Melbourne he was noted for beginning the campaign to shorten the working day to eight hours in the stonemason industry, the first industry to grant this concession. He eventually bought 250 acres on Inglewood Road outside Bendigo in the early 1860s which he farmed for the next 9 years. After which he opened a successful stonemasonry business in Sandhurst with his son William



Source: David Fisher – Property Caretaker (photo taken prior to any external renovations)

Beebe Jnr. His work can still be seen in some of the building and cemeteries around Bendigo. He began construction of the Rocky Vale Villa on his farm in 1873.^{ix} The villa was completed in 1891, the same year Beebe Snr died aged 60^x. His health had started failing a year prior but he continued to work. He was diagnosed with bronchitis and a weak heart a few days before his death.^{xi}

Beebe Family:

William Beebe Snr had several children, of which two are of particular note. John Beebe carried on his father’s work as a stonemason and then architect, eventually forming a business partnership with renowned architect William Vahland. Together and separately these two architects designed many of the major buildings in Bendigo.^{xii} Several of these buildings are currently heritage listed by the Bendigo City Council.

William Beebe Jnr, after being a partner in his father’s stonemasonry business at 19, also became an architect after his father’s death. His work is also highly regarded and examples are heritage listed by Bendigo City Council. William Jnr, in addition to being a Justice of the Peace,^{xiii} became a City Councilman in 1913^{xiv} and was elected Mayor in 1915 for two consecutive terms.^{xv} As Mayor he is credited with improving health amenities and being instrumental in the laying of sewerage pipes in Bendigo.^{xvi} William Jnr was awarded a



M.B.E. (Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) in 1920.^{xvii} He was also a regular in the local society pages, mainly for his participation on multiple committees, however he is also mentioned for personal activities such as his leaving on a trip around the world^{xviii} and suffering influenza (but recovering well).^{xix} William Beebe Jnr died in November 1923 aged 63.^{xx}

Source: Narrapumelap website: <http://www.narrapumelap.com.au/>

Comparative Analysis:

Generally houses of coursed stone were built by wealthy owners, and these houses often showed gothic influences. In eastern Australia there are more adventurous 19th century examples including Abercrombie House in Bathurst (1870-1878), Carthonia in Sydney (1841-1844), the

Hawthorns in Hawthorn (1846), and Narrapumelan in Wickliffe (1877). The Rocky Vale Villa, while less adventurous architecturally, is much more detailed and focusses on the basics of stonemasonry construction. Within Bendigo Shire there is one contemporary stone house at 12 Weir Court Kangaroo Flat (1867) although this is much more simple in detail and design.^{xxi}

The architectural style Victorian is synonymous with the gold rush in Victoria.^{xxii} It's most flamboyant examples are often found in Boom Town, a historical and architectural term describing the period of 1870 to 1890. It is considered a golden age of architecture identified by indulgences in extravagance and the 'battle of the styles', a contest between renaissance and gothic architectural styles.^{xxiii}

The Bendigo City Council has termed the local examples of this era to be Bendigo Boom. The Bendigo Boom developed a unique style thanks to local architects including those in the Beebe family. The Bendigo Boom style was developed due to the sudden wealth of many residents and their desire to display this wealth in their homes. The prominence of architecture in Bendigo meant that individuals who received an influx of money often had homes designed by the same architects who designed Bendigo's grand public buildings.^{xxiv}



Source: Abercrombie House website: <http://www.abercrombiehouse.com.au/>

The Rocky Vale Villa has several features of Bendigo Boom; a carriage entry way at the rear of the house, outhouses, a hipped roof and the new technology of corrugated galvanised steel.^{xxv} However there are many features of Bendigo Boom that are not found in the Villa; verandahs, which were otherwise almost mandatory,

elaborate geometric detailing and fences, both also very common, while sandstone was not a common building material for residences.^{xxvi}

That the Villa was built on a working farm may have affected the need for a fence. Thus the Villa is both an extravagant example of the Bendigo Boom style and period, and unique for its dissimilarities from the dominant style of the period.



Source: Heritage Design Guidelines – City of Greater Bendigo (example of Bendigo Boom)

Condition of site:

The external walls are in good condition except for damage caused by modern additions to the house and some damage to the sandstone on the eastern face from unknown causes. The interior structure is fairly intact, if degraded, apart from the demolished staircase. However the fixtures and ornamental details, such as the mantle pieces, have been removed and/or destroyed.

The house is currently under the supervision of a caretaker and visitation is restricted. There are no current plans for restoration. There is also no intension of removing any of the exterior additions in the foreseeable future.

Victorian Framework of Historical Themes:

4.6 – Exploiting other material, forest and water resources

5.8 – Working

6.6 – Marking significant phases in development of Victoria's settlements, towns and cities

6.7 – Making homes for Victorians

Assessment against Criteria:

Criterion A: Importance to the course, or pattern, of the City of Greater Bendigo's cultural history.

The Rocky Vale Villa is an unusual representation of the Bendigo Boom period, in itself a significant period for its fusion of architectural and design styles.^{xxvii} The Villa was also the Beebe Family home, three members of which were involved in the evolution of the Bendigo Boom style. The Villa represents the Bendigo Boom period in both its architectural style and its historical associations.

Criterion B: Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the City the of Greater Bendigo's cultural history.

The Rocky Vale Villa is an elaborate example of the gothic revival architectural style common in parts of Victoria and New South Wales in the mid to late 19th century, a style rarely found in personal residences in this municipality.^{xxviii}

Criterion C: Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the City of Greater Bendigo's cultural history.

N/A

Criterion D: Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or objects.

N/A

Criterion E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics in the context of the municipality.

The Rocky Vale Villa is a gothic revival styled personal residence that shows the influence of the local Bendigo Boom style of personal residences. The villa is a distinct blend of these two architectural influences. Additionally it is a highly detailed example of the stonemasonry of the Australian Boom Town specifically designed and built by a renowned stonemason of the Bendigo Boom period.

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

N/A

Criterion G: Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of the place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.

N/A

Criterion H: Special association with life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in the City of Greater Bendigo's history.

The Rocky Vale Villa is the Beebe family home. Three members of the Beebe family, William Snr, William Jnr and John, were all stonemasons and architects involved in the development of the town of Bendigo and the Bendigo Boom style. William Beebe Jnr was also a city councilman and mayor between 1910 – 1920 during which time he was heavily involved in development many of the town's utilities and amenities.

Statement of Significance:

What is significant?

The Rocky Vale Villa, including the associated contemporary barn, dams, entry way and gardens, are of historical and aesthetic (architectural) significance. The architectural detailing on the house, and use of material quarried onsite, are of particular significance as examples of a

fusion of architectural styles of historical importance. The remaining features of the original property, particularly the stone walls and the contemporary barn including blacksmith work area, provide important context to the original property of which the Villa was a part.

The more recent buildings and addition are not significant and detract from the interpretation of the property.^{xxix}

How is it significant?

The Rocky Vale Villa is of historical and aesthetic (architectural) significance.

Why is it significant?

The Rocky Vale Villa has a strong blend of historical and aesthetic (architectural) significance. The Villa's architectural significance is strongly associated with the history of Greater Bendigo and its historical significance is strongly associated with the architectural style of Bendigo. Bendigo's cultural history (criterion A) is strongly represented by the Bendigo



Boom period both architecturally and historically. As a personal residence designed and built by a stonemason who himself built many public building during the establishment of Bendigo, the Villa is an excellent example of Bendigo's Boom Town period. As a house built in the gothic revival style, a rare style in Greater Bendigo but common in 19th century Victoria and New South Wales, the Villa is an example of the broader architectural style within Greater Bendigo (criterion B).

Source: Lovell Chen Architects & Heritage Consultants Pty Ltd

As an unusual fusion of the broader architectural style gothic revival and the Bendigo Boom style the Villa is a detailed representation of multiple influences in one period within Greater Bendigo (criterion E). It is also significant as a personal work by a stonemason whose work was part of the development of the Bendigo Boom style. The historical associations of the Villa's architect, builder and owner, William Beebe Snr, and his sons John and William Jnr, with the establishment of the city of Bendigo cannot be overstated (criterion H). From an architectural standpoint the Beebe family's work in Bendigo is strongly credited with the establishment of the Boom Town and the town's endurance



Source: Denis Fitzgerald – Show Me Bendigo (Facebook)

after the gold rush. The distinct style of Bendigo is credited in part the architectural work of the Beebe family. William Beebe Jr's position as councilman and Mayor in later years further cements the importance of the Beebe family in the development of the City of Greater Bendigo.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Rocky Vale Villa continue to be heritage listed within the Greater City of Bendigo, although it is recommended that the listing include reference to the remaining features of the original property including the contemporary barn, the two dams, the stone walls and the rear entry way. It is not recommended that an application be made for Victorian Heritage Registration. The historical importance of the property is primarily significant to Bendigo itself and the architectural fusion of styles, while unusual, is more significant within the context of the history of Bendigo.

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- ^{iv} Tonkin, "Architect Creating a Landscape", p. 551
- ^v Tonkin, "Architect Creating a Landscape", p. 562-563
- ^{vi} Tonkin, "Architect Creating a Landscape", p. 552
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- ^{xxvii} "Heritage Design Guidelines," p. 10
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