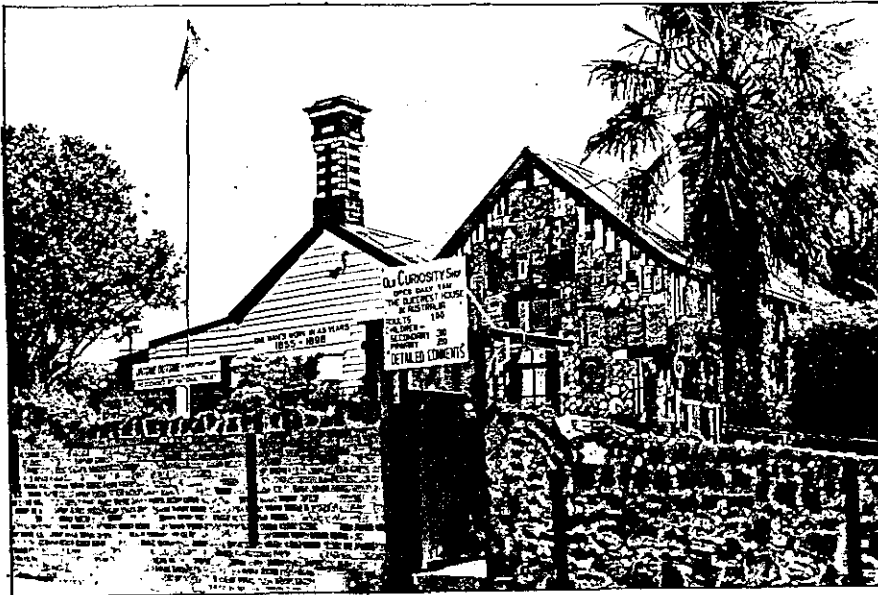


OLD CURIOSITY SHOP

7 Queen Street, East Ballarat

erected c.1855, opened to public 1897



CURRENT ASSESSMENTS

Register of the National Estate

Classified: National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Old Curiosity Shop be added to the Historic Buildings Register and be specified under the provisions of Clause 8 of the *Town and Country Planning Act* (Third Schedule), as well as its retention on the Register of the National Estate.

BUILDING HISTORY AND ANALYSIS

James Warwick a versatile bricklayer and plasterer migrated from Cornwall arriving in Ballarat in 1855. Attracted by the frantic pace of Ballarat life with its strong demand for labour to service the goldfield population, Warwick continued to follow his trade. Specializing in chimneys, he quickly established his business and apparently built his residence soon after arriving in the town. The cottage, of four small rooms, was typical of hundreds around it, distinguished perhaps only by Warwick's polychromatic brick chimney.

Soon James Warwick began a collection which increasingly became a passion for him. He collected glass bottles (generally broken), china pieces, old dolls (limbs, heads or torsos), glazed tiles, shells, teapots, crockery, jars, lids, crocks, cups and other sundry objects d'art with which he proceeded to decorate his cottage. No area was spared. Walls, paths, and fences all received attention with equal diligence. The flood of materials was encouraged by rewarding children with pennies and sweets. Thus a broken doll might be traded by its youthful owner for a boiled lolly only to be affixed on the fence with Warwick's special mortar, made from crushed shells. After 1897, when the cottage was opened to the public, people flocked to see the "Old Curiosity House". Arriving by horse and cart or on foot, admission of 3d. was charged, and once inside such wonders as a fan made by the good Mrs. Warwick from discarded feathers of her pet cockatoo kept our Edwardian forefathers enthralled.

James Warwick died on 9 August 1898, only one year after his *magnum opus* was opened to the public. His wife carried on until her death in 1901 and then responsibility rested on the shoulders of their son. Today the house is privately owned but still open to the public.¹

The building and surrounds are important for two main reasons. The building is a very early (perhaps the earliest) local example of a house being opened as a tourist attraction. More importantly, it is the best example of the 'shell and glass ethos' displayed in many tourist centres throughout Australia. Whereas most decorative uses of applied material are as an embellishment to other objects (crowns, fish ponds, etc.) here the totality of the scheme and the naive patterns are of compelling interest. It is appropriate to recognise the importance of the house for these reasons, especially at a time when domestic crafts and decorative arts are being reassessed.

1. Chesser, E.L., *The Queerest House in Australia*, pamphlet, n.d. held in National Trust of Australia (Victoria), File No.1192.

