

Rokewood Presbyterian Church Complex, Rokewood

Address: 60 Ferrars Road, Rokewood

Construction Date/s: 1865-66, 1874, 1905, 1951-52.

Level of Significance: State

Heritage Overlay No: HO61



Rokewood Presbyterian Church, 2012.



Rokewood Presbyterian Church with hall at rear, n.d. [c.1952]. Source: Leigh Historical Society.

Statement of Significance¹

What is Significant?

The Rokewood Presbyterian Church, 60 Ferrars Road, Rokewood, has outstanding significance as a predominantly intact example of an unusual and distinguished Victorian Decorated Gothic-styled Presbyterian Church in a rural setting. Built in 1865-66, it represents the first major design by the prolific and notable architect, Alexander Davidson, who had been enticed to emigrate from Scotland to Rokewood by his uncle, Rev. John Cooper, the Presbyterian Minister at Rokewood between 1859 and 1866. A landmark in the small township of Rokewood, the contextually large scale and elaborate building is a legacy of the wealthy benefactors of the Presbyterian Church in the Rokewood district, notably the Russell family of 'Wurrock' and the Elder families of the Kuruc-a-ruc Estate and 'The Meadows'. The significance of the church is embodied in its design and construction, the coursed bluestone Victorian Decorative Gothic Revival styled building being characterised by a distinctive articulation of steeply-pitched and parapeted gable roof forms clad in slate (comprising a cruciform layout) and a landmark tower with broach spire added in 1905. In addition to the tower and spire, the decorative tracery windows and freestone dressings – and particularly the

¹ The heritage assessment criteria and format of this statement of significance accord with the VPP Practice Note 1: Applying the Heritage Overlay, revised September 2012, Department of Planning & Community Development.

stylised trefoil and half-trefoil motifs in the gable apexes, ends to the parapet corbels and the Italian-pointed ventilators – became common design details in Davidson’s subsequent work. Internally, the church is especially notable for its elegant timber collar and tie roof trusses having curved ribs supported by plaster consoles, timber-lined ceiling and original timber pews and surviving timber liturgical furniture also designed by Davidson. Four memorial plaques adorn the walls in memory of members of the Russell and Elder families. The rear Victorian Carpenter Gothic-styled hall was built in c.1862 as the Church of England church at Smythesdale. It was relocated to the Rokewood Church site in 1951, having been funded by Miss Gladys Bell, a wealthy benefactor associated with the nearby Wurrook South Estate. Opened in 1952, it was named after Miss Bell’s late brother, Alan Bell. The hall contributes to the significance of the Rokewood Presbyterian Church.

How is it Significant?

The Rokewood Presbyterian Church is architecturally, historically and socially significant at a state level.

Why is it Significant?

The Rokewood Presbyterian Church, Rokewood, is historically significant (Practice Note Criteria A & H) for its associations with the development and witness of the Presbyterian Church in the Rokewood district since its construction in 1865-66 (the vestry being added in 1874 and the tower and spire in 1905). The Church also has associations with the initial establishment of Presbyterianism as early as 1847 when the Rev John Gow was inducted to the pastoral Charge of Colac and Woody Yallock (later named Rokewood). The prosperity of the Rokewood Presbyterian Church came from a number of wealthy benefactors from nearby pastoral properties, including the Russell family of Wurrook and the Elder family of Kuruc-a-ruc and The Meadows, together with the rapid growth of the township as a result of the gold boom in Rokewood and surrounding districts in the 1850s and 1860s. The Rokewood Presbyterian Church has associations with numerous clergy and members of the congregation who have played key roles in its life and witness. Of particular note was the Rev. John Cooper who enticed his architect-nephew, Alexander Davidson, to emigrate to Rokewood in 1864. Davidson was responsible for the design of the Rokewood Church (including the vestry in 1874 and the tower and spire in 1905) and it was a precursor to numerous church, homestead and other commissions (a sizeable number for Presbyterian squatters in the Western District) until his death in 1908. In partnership with his cousin, George Henderson, between 1867 and 1877, the architectural firm of Davidson and Henderson established a highly successful practice, creating unique designs partly based on the writings of the French architect, Viollet-le-Duc and his *Dictionnaire*. Another notable figure associated with the church is Miss Gladys Bell, an important benefactor who funded the relocation of the former Smythesdale Church of England to the Rokewood Church site in 1951. The former church building opened as the Alan Bell Memorial Hall (in memory of Gladys Bell’s brother).

The Rokewood Presbyterian Church, Shelford, is architecturally significant (Practice Note Criteria D & E) as an outstanding and contextually elaborate example of Victorian Decorated Gothic Presbyterian Church architecture in the Shire and State of Victoria. This is especially identified in the cruciform plan comprising intersecting steeply pitched gables, landmark tower with broach spire (added in 1905) and in the well-considered and holistic detailing of stylised trefoil and half-trefoil motifs that were features of other works by the architect, Davidson. Internally, the holistic approach to the design is continued, with the unusual and elegant timber collar and tie roof trusses having curved ribs supported by plaster consoles, timber-lined ceiling and original timber pews and surviving timber liturgical furniture.

The architectural significance of the Church hall has been partly compromised by its location on elevated stumps (resulting from its relocation) and modest skillion kitchen addition. However, it contributes to the significance of the place as a physical embodiment of its former role as the Church of England at Smythesdale (c.1862-1951) and from 1951 as the Presbyterian Sunday School and Hall at Rokewood.

The Rokewood Presbyterian Church, Rokewood, is socially significant (Practice Note Criterion G) as it is recognised and valued by sections of the local community for religious reasons, as a symbol of their faith and their history of local participation in faith education. The church interior includes four memorials to members of the Russell and Elder families, pioneers of the district and active members of the Church. These memorials therefore have commemorative value.

Description

The Setting

The Rokewood Presbyterian Church at 60 Ferrars Road, Rokewood, is set on a contextually large rectangular site bordered by eucalypt trees and shrubs, with large open grassed areas. The church is accessed by a central gravel path that forms an apron around the building. The Alan Bell Hall is located at the rear.

The Church

The coursed bluestone Victorian Decorative Gothic Revival styled church building is characterised by the distinctive steeply-pitched and parapeted gable roof forms clad in slate and a landmark tower with broach spire added in 1905. The forms are defined by the centrally-projecting nave at the front, with side-projecting shallow transepts and rear-projecting chancel. At the rear (north-east corner) is a gabled vestry (added in 1874). The bluestone wall construction is accentuated by the freestone dressings as quoinwork, contextually-elaborate tracery windows in the main gable ends, corbelled parapet ends capped with stylised trefoil motifs, half-trefoil motifs in the gable apexes and the Italian-pointed ventilators high up in the gable ends. The front (south) gable is also crowned with an early cast iron finial.

A landmark feature of the church is the corner tower and spire. It has similar construction and detailing as the main church building, even though it was built almost 40 years later. The square tower base has projecting buttresses at the corner, together with stylised lancets over three levels, the uppermost paired lancet ventilators (comprising the belfry) being crowned by quatrefoil motifs. Surmounting the tower is the broach spire having an unusual recessive octagonal base augmented by small blind pointed-arched openings and an elongated spire with projecting gablets at its base. These gablets continue the stylised trefoil theme identified on other parts of the church, with the front, rear and side gablets comprising ventilators. At the base of the tower on the east side is a marble memorial foundation stone that reads: "Memorial stone placed by Mrs N.G. Elder, Tower and Spire presented by Thomas Russell, of Wurrook, 23 March 1905. A. Davidson Arch."

The church is entered at the base of the tower at the front which has a pointed-arched double door opening with vertically-boarded timber doors. The stained timber lined and shallow-coved ceiling and hard plaster walls are original, but the tessellated tile floor (on a concrete base) has replaced the original floor. On the west side of the porch is a pointed-arched door opening that leads into the church. The doors in the opening have been refaced.

The interior is especially distinguished by the elegant timber collar and tie roof trusses having curved ribs supported by plaster consoles. The ceiling is timber lined and the pendant electric lights have been introduced. The hard plaster walls appear to be original, as are the timber floor boards (with introduced carpet over). The church is lit by four sets large tracery windows having geometric stained glass. These windows are contextually elaborate for a rural Presbyterian church built in the 1860s. The chancel as a raised, stepped timber floor covered in introduced carpet.

The unusual nature of the church interior is further accentuated by the layout of the original timber pews. The southern portion of the nave has a central aisle with flanking pews, while the central portion of the nave at the junction with the transepts has side aisles and central pews. The transepts have pews flanking short central aisles. The pews have vertical timber-lined backs, the ends featuring pointed-arched caps (following the detailing of the stylised trefoils on the exterior). The pews are connected by centrally-located timbers. Although the original communion rails have been removed, much of liturgical furniture in the chancel seems to be original as the stylised trefoil and quatrefoil motifs characterising the chairs and pulpit are reflective of design detailing commonly employed by the architect, Davidson (the quatrefoil motif was the business logo of the architectural firm of Davidson and his partner, George Henderson).

On the walls are four memorials to well-known members of the congregation. There is a marble tablet in memory of Nairne Guthrie Elder (died 1911, senior member of Session) and his son, Nairne (died 1910), and plaques in memory of Thomas Russell of Wurrook (died 1920, elder of the Church in 1868,) Anna Louisa Russell, wife of Thomas Russell (died 1913), and John Nairne Elder of "The Meadows (died 1946 after lifelong service to the church having been elected an elder in 1889).

At the rear, accessed by a door opening on the east side of the chancel is the vestry. It has an early timber-lined and stained ceiling although the hard plaster walls appear to have been repaired and the kitchen furniture and fittings and floor covering have been introduced.

The Hall

At the rear of the site is the Victorian Carpenter Gothic styled hall. It has a gable roof form clad in corrugated sheet metal, timber weatherboard wall cladding, pointed arched timber-framed casement windows and a centrally-located pointed arched door opening on the south side, having panelled timber doors and blind highlights. The building sits on elevated stumps, being evidence of its relocation to the site. Towards the rear on the east side is a projecting skillion kitchen addition added in 1951. It is constructed of the same materials as the hall and has a brick chimney at the rear, with a door opening on the south side and a timber framed double hung window on the east side. Both the hall and the kitchen are accessed by a series of steps.

History

Early Development of Rokewood

The early history of the Rokewood district was associated with several pioneer squatting families, most of whom were Presbyterian. They settled on large runs in the late 1830s and early 1840s, including Commeralghip (pre-emptive right granted to Gordon MacMillian in 1852), Dereel (also taken up by MacMillan), Glenfine (owned by William Rowe in 1853), Wurrook (owned by Thomas Russell from 1857) and Kuruk-a-ruc (owned by William Elder in the 1860s).

In 1852, Rokewood was gazetted as a township, about the time of the nearby Corindhap gold rush. Initially a strategic stop route near the crossing of the Kuruc-a-ruc Creek, it was the nearby goldfields that brought the major transformation of Rokewood. According to Heritage Matters Pty Ltd in the 'Golden Plains Shire Heritage Study Stage 2', "the mined areas in the Rokewood township extended from the swimming pool, in front of the school, behind the tennis courts and opposite the old manse." In 1865, Rokewood was described as "a postal town under the control of Shire of Leigh council, situated on the Kuruc-a-ruc Creek, and on the great Western Road, 86 miles W from Melbourne." At this time, Rokewood boasted a court of petty sessions, a post and money order office, two schools, and two hotels. The population was approximately 950 people. In the *Geelong and Western District Directory 1882-83*, Rokewood was described as:

... "a telegraph station on Kuruc-a-ruc creek, eighty six and a half miles from Melbourne, and forty-one and a half miles from Geelong, on the main road to Hamilton and Portland. Coach via Smythesdale to Ballarat daily, and to and from Geelong via Leigh road railway station on alternate days. There are three hotels. A good deal of land in the neighbourhood is under cultivation, chiefly cereals, but the country is most pastoral. The Commercial Bank of Australia has a branch here. There are three churches, an Oddfellows' lodge, a State school, mechanics' institute, public library, and a police station."

Several of the neighbouring pastoral properties were subdivided after World War Two as part of the Government's Soldier Settlement Scheme. The influx of new families boosted Rokewood's population and social development, with the memorial hall built in 1959. In the 1950s, the population was 300 (increasing from the post-gold rush declines) and remain the same in 1980.

The Early Years of the Presbyterian Church at Rokewood

On 3 November 1847, the Rev. John Gow, a licentiate of the established Church of Scotland, under the jurisdiction of the Presbytery of Glasgow, was ordained and inducted to the pastoral Charge of Colac and Woody Yalloak (later named Rokewood), by the Presbytery of Melbourne. With the Rev. Gow's removal to the pastorate of Smythesdale and Scarsdale, the Rev. Archibald Simpson of The Leigh (Shelford) conducted monthly services at Rokewood between 1854 and 1857. These services were initially held in private homes, then in McLarty's Hotel and later in the school that had been built in 1851 (and sponsored by L. Elder Senior and supported by other local Presbyterians).

On 13 December 1859, the Rev. John Cooper (who had arrived from Edinburgh, Scotland) was inducted to the Pastoral Charge of Rokewood and Cressy. At this time there were 7000 people at the nearby Pitfield diggings and the need for a Presbyterian presence led the Rev. Cooper to include Pitfield in his pastorate. At the height of the gold boom in 1866, and after a dispute with his congregation over the payment of his stipend, the Rev. Cooper received a call to Pentridge (Coburg). His successor was the Rev. John Steele who had recently arrived from the Church of Scotland.

The Building of the Church

The increasing Presbyterian population at Rokewood in the late 1850s brought about the need for a permanent church building. Although the construction of the manse took immediate priority in 1860, the project to build a church was launched in August 1864. A building committee was appointed consisting of Messrs. Nairn and William Elder, Thomas Russell, W. White and W. McAndrew, with Mr Elliott as secretary. Nairn Elder of "The Meadows" homestead was an active worker of the church and a member of the Board. Thomas Russell of

“Wurrook” was to become an ordained elder of the Church in 1868 and between 1868 and 1873 he served as a Member in the Victorian Parliament.

Just months before the launching of the church fund, the Rev. Cooper had returned to Edinburgh where he persuaded his architect nephew, Alexander Davidson, to emigrate to Rokewood to prepare designs for the local Presbyterian Church. Davidson arrived at the Presbyterian Manse at Rokewood on Christmas Eve, 1864. By this time, £1,200 had been raised. According to Allan Willingham in *The Biographical Dictionary of the Western District of Victoria*, Davidson had “completed both the documentation and a fine lithographed perspective for the new Presbyterian church at Rokewood within two months of his arrival.” Tenders were advertised for its construction in the *Geelong Advertiser* on 20 February 1865 and in *The Argus* on 7 April 1865. The site for the church was purchased at a cost of £8 on 11 March 1865. On 26 May 1865, Davidson advertised tenders for the quarrying of the bluestone at William Elder’s nearby Kuruc-a-ruc Estate. The foundation stone was subsequently laid by the daughter of Mrs. Elder of “The Meadows” (acting in the place of her mother who had taken ill). According to the Rokewood Presbyterian Charge Centenary Celebration booklet of 1949, Miss Elder “was presented with an engraved Silver Trowel and a silver-mounted Setting Maul [mallet] to mark the occasion. In the cavity beneath the stone various coins of the realm, papers and wheat were placed.” On 16 August 1865, tenders were called for roofing the church. Several months later on 12 June and 3 July 1866, Davidson advertised tenders for the construction of the church furniture.

The Rokewood Presbyterian Church opened on 23 August 1866 at 12 o’clock by the Rev. J.O. Dykes, M.A., two years after the project to build it had been launched. However, the vestry and spire had not been built. The bluestone Gothic-styled church building created interest in the district, with its distinctive cruciform plan and specially-designed furniture. Of particular interest was the timber ceiling structure which the Presbyterian Church, Rokewood, Centenary Booklet in 1966 described as follows:

“The peculiar roof trussing was a special feature of the building and to this day the design of the trussing is almost unique in the Southern Hemisphere so much so that many architects, builders and engineers have made special inspections of that section of the building.”

Towards the Completion of the Church Building

With the newly-opened church incomplete, attention turned to realising Davidson’s original design. In May 1870, Messrs. I and W. Elder endowed the church £1000 and soon after this was matched by Thomas Russell and in return a pew was set aside for the use of the owners of Kuruc-a-ruc Estate. In September 1871, the church agreed to dispose of the school building and set aside the proceeds to the building of the vestry. On 31 January 1874, Davidson called tenders in the *Geelong Advertiser* for additions to the church building. These additions appear to have been the construction of the gabled bluestone vestry at the rear of the church.

Almost 40 years after the opening of the church, a memorial foundation stone was laid on 23 March 1905 by Mrs W.G. Elder for the construction of a tower and spire. A gift of Thomas Russell of Wurrook Homestead, the tower and spire was also designed by Alexander Davidson and it marked one of his later commissions. The memorial stone ceremony was reported in the *Ballarat Courier* newspaper on 27 March 1905, the steeple being described as follows: “The design of the architect (Mr Davidson) was a very beautiful one, and the work was being carried out in a first-class manner by the contractors (Messrs. Rowsell).”

The tower and spire design had been completed by 8 December 1904 as it was at this time when the Board of Public Health had received the plans and specifications. Although Willingham claims that the tower and spire were “in exact accordance with Davidson’s original design,” a comparison of Davidson’s lithograph of the original design (a copy is in Willingham’s ‘Two Scots in Victoria’) shows there were subtle variations to the realised scheme, including the recessive octagonal spire base and the crowning finial.

The Board subsequently prepared a basic plan of the church which showed the stylised cruciform layout with the main corner entrance comprising the tower. The vestry was shown at the rear. Interestingly, the Board requested the discontinuance of glass fonts in the church and the installation of “proper bolts” on the two front doors.

A bell for the tower had been presented to the church many years earlier in 1868 by the local sheep farmer, James Grant. In 1966, the Centenary Booklet for the Rokewood Church declared that:

“Today the church spire stands as a land-mark in the district for many miles around distinguishing itself from modern church buildings and remaining as a visual link with the district pioneers and the Mother Country.”

The church building had been completed well in advance of the Golden Jubilee that involved a week-long celebration that was proposed to commence on 27 August 1916. The celebration was to include a performance of the reopening of the church by Mrs Elder of “The Meadows”, but owing to her inability to attend on that day, it was held over until the following Sunday. Two largely-attended church services conducted by the Rev. A. Stewart of Essendon especially marked the jubilee celebrations.

Other Changes to the Church

Through the early years of the 20th century, the Rokewood church was also the location of the Corindhap Church of England. The Anglican Church proposed to purchase a half share in the Presbyterian Church building, but this request was refused by the Presbyterian officials.

In the late 1920s or early 1930s, the communion rails that were attached to the front pew were removed and stored (they were later replaced and then completely removed in 1958). In 1934, the bell tower was ‘weather-proofed’ and in the following year it was found that the spire “was in a dangerous condition.” The spire was subsequently repaired along with general repairs to the main church building at a cost of £167-10-0. Repairs to the west window and south wall were substandard and the contractors were required to fully complete the work. These costs were covered by a bequest to the church of £250 by the estate of H. MacIntosh of Pitfield.

Disaster struck the Rokewood community on 14 January 1944 when a grass fire swept through the Western District and “several homes, churches and public halls were reduced to ashes and Rokewood, on the South Eastern extremity of the burnt-out area, suffered heavily.” The Presbyterian manse that had been built in 1860 was completely destroyed.

A photograph of the front of the church property in 1947 (at the time of the centenary of the Presbyterian Church in the district) shows that it was bound at the front by an early timber picket fence, having a pedestrian gate that was centred with the front of the church building. Cypress trees, possibly planted in the 1920s or 1930s, flanked the pedestrian gate and there were mature eucalypts forming the borders to the side and rear property boundaries.

Other changes occurred in the second half of the 20th century. In 1962, electricity was installed at the church and hall. In 1984, a new toilet block was proposed at the rear of the church hall.

The Alan Bell Hall

While the Rokewood Presbyterian Church boasted a substantial church building, it was without a hall for much of its history and from 1871 at least, without a satisfactory location for the Sunday School. Until 1944, Sunday School was held in the vestry and due to overcrowding, classes were moved to the nearby Mechanics' Institute Hall in 1945.

During the next two years, consideration was given to the erection or acquisition of a hall. Financial support was sought from Miss (Margaret) Gladys Bell, daughter of the pioneering family of Wurrock South Estate. She promised a yearly donation of £50 and asked that the hall commemorate her late brother, Alan C. Bell. A further donation was to be made by Miss Bell upon the completion of the hall. By May 1947, the Church had purchased an army hut from Ballarat for £304. The Church Secretary wrote to the Department of Public Health, detailing the building and the proposal as follows:

“We have an army building 54 ft by 24 ft, walls 8 ft high, the walls and roof are galvanized iron and it has a hardwood floor. I am enclosing a rough plan of our proposed building. We intend to have the exterior walls of weather boards and cement sheets and line it with Masonite and plaster sheets. It is to be used as a Sunday School hall and for Church work and is to be at the back of the Rokewood Presbyterian Church in the township of Rokewood, Shire of Leigh.

The contractor will be R.G. Groves, 18 Princes St Nth, Ballarat, and the estimated cost is £658.”

The Department sought a number of changes to door openings and that a completely dimension plan be provided. Approval was subsequently sought after K Murray Forster, architect of Melbourne, had prepared the necessary drawings for the hall's conversion in August 1948.

Although approval was granted and the former army hut relocated to the rear of the church building, it was not to be converted and made functional as a Sunday School hall. It was soon sold for £555 when plans were prepared for a completely new hall in 1949.

Instead, several existing halls were inspected throughout the district in an effort to procure an existing building for relocation. In 1951, the Church committee resolved to purchase the former Church of England church at Smythesdale for £500. This modest Victorian Carpenter Gothic styled building had been built in 1862 and it is shown in a photograph in its original location in c.1925. On its relocated site behind the Presbyterian Church, a sink and stove were immediately installed and it was furnished with 50 steel chairs and a piano. The following year in 1952, the building was opened and officially named the Alan Bell Hall. In 1953, a Masonite floor covering was added and the building painted. The hall is shown in a photograph of the church property about this time (the cypress trees at the front had also been removed). By 1966, the Sunday School attendees had increased to 70 from 19 names at the time of the opening of the hall.

Comparative Analysis

Other Churches by Alexander Davidson

Alexander Davidson was born in Edinburgh on 17 May 1839, the first son of Samuel and May Davidson. He was first articled to John Henderson, his uncle, and the father of George with

whom Alexander later formed the successful architectural partnership. According to Allan Willingham in *The Biographical Dictionary of the Western District of Victoria*, Davidson had already lived an eventful life as a young up and coming architect in Edinburgh before his arrival at Rokewood in 1864, including fathering a daughter out of wedlock by his first cousin, Euphemia Cooper. They were married at Rokewood in 1865 (their daughter, Euphemia, being brought up by Davidson's parents at Kingussie in the County of Inverness). Davidson was joined by George Henderson (1846-1905) in 1867. Initially the unpaid architectural assistant, Henderson became a partner and the firm was known as Davidson and Henderson. Much of the firm's work involved designing homesteads, additions to homesteads and substantial outbuildings for Scottish Presbyterian squatters, given Davidson's well-known connections to the Presbyterian Church. The practice relocated from Rokewood to Geelong in 1869. The firm built up its successful business mainly through the influence of Violet-le-Duc's *Dictionnaire* that Henderson had brought with him. However, Davidson and Henderson created their own unique Victorian eclectic architecture. In 1877, Henderson returned to Scotland and Davidson practiced under the name, Alexander Davidson and Company.

Although Davidson had designed additions to the Elders' Kura-a-ruc homestead in 1865, his first major commission was the design of the Rokewood Presbyterian Church in the same year. A stone parsonage and temporary church for the Episcopalian Church at Rokewood soon followed. The prolific nature of the Davidson's work is especially identified in the numerous churches he designed (both in partnership with Henderson and under this own name) from the 1860s. They included a Wesleyan Church at Mortlake (1867), Episcopal Church at Colac (1869), Presbyterian Church, Ceres (1870), Presbyterian Church, Skipton (1871), Wesleyan Church, Newtown (1876), Wickliffe Presbyterian Church tower (1877), Roman Catholic Church, Batesford (1881) and St. Thomas' Presbyterian Church, Werribee (1884).

Variations in the Gothic style were adopted in the designing of these churches, with some familiar features of the Rokewood church identified in his later church designs. Of particular interest was the adoption of the Gothic French mode in his churches, including the octagonal tower and broach spire (added in 1905), and trefoil and quatrefoil motifs first employed at Rokewood but also found the Presbyterian Church Wickliffe, and St. Thomas's Presbyterian Church, Werribee. Some other churches also reflect the more unique decorative detailing influenced by the French architect, Viollet-le-Duc that are not present at Rokewood, including the detailing of chamfer stops and gargoyles at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Skipton, the roof trusses decorated with carved eagles at St. Thomas's, Werribee, and the roof trusses at the former Methodist Church at Mortlake which had originally featured carved gargoyles. The roof at Mortlake has been described by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) as having "rather oddly bracketed hammer beam trusses" but it is not known whether these trusses are comparable with those at Rokewood.

Other Churches in the Golden Plains Shire

The Rokewood Presbyterian Church represents one of 28 surviving churches in the Golden Plains Shire (see Schedule to the Heritage Overlay). The most comparable with the Rokewood Church are the Presbyterian churches built of bluestone in the late 1850s and early 1860s. They are:

- Presbyterian Church, 42 Pyke Street, Teesdale, built in 1858 with the front timber porch added in 1934. This modestly-scaled astylar church building is the earliest Presbyterian church in the Golden Plains Shire and its rudimentary design is reflective of Presbyterian philosophy. The Rokewood Church is more substantial and externally intact.

- Leigh Presbyterian Church, 1716 Bannockburn-Shelford Road, Shelford, built in 1859 to a design by the Geelong architect, Joseph Shaw. The building is a predominantly intact example of a Victorian Early English Gothic style, the tower and steeple being a landmark in the town. Some of the external details, including the octagonal belfry and spire, and the use of trefoil openings in the rear gable, are similar to Davidson's Rokewood Church but in a more rudimentary way. This is continued in the interior, with slender timber ceiling trusses but the overall character of the Shelford interior is more conservative and conventional compared to the Rokewood building.
- Presbyterian Church, 48 High Street, Inverleigh, built in 1861 and also to a design by J.L. Shaw. This building is a smaller example than the Leigh Presbyterian Church, lacking the landmark tower and steeple of the Shelford building. It is similarly designed in a Victorian Early English Gothic style, with steeply-pitched and parapeted slate roof, being three bayed with projecting buttresses and similar pointed-arched windows. The main gable end at the front has tripartite lancets. There is a side entrance porch that was added in 1885. The Inverleigh Church has been substantially altered internally.
- Former Free Presbyterian Church, Midland Highway, Meredith, built in 1868, the church comprises a steeply-pitched gabled roof clad in slate, and front gabled porch. The building is smaller than the Leigh Church, having a three-bayed composition. The church only functioned until 1882. In 1910, it was leased to the Meredith Masonic Lodge No. 161 and the Lodge acquired the site in 1961. There is a cream brick masonic temple at one side of the church (built in 1961) and a hall at the rear.

Overall, the Rokewood Presbyterian Church represents one of the more distinctive and outstanding examples of Victorian Gothic Revival Presbyterian Church architecture constructed of bluestone in the Golden Plains Shire and in the State of Victoria.

Condition

Overall, the Rokewood Presbyterian Church is in fair-good condition. There is staining on the stonework due to debris build up in the gutters and deterioration in the parapet copings and window sills and some spalling freestone. In the porch there is evidence of dampness in the introduced tile floor.

The Church hall is in good condition although showing signs of weathering.

Integrity

Substantially intact, externally and internally.

Recommendations

Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls

External Paint Controls:	Yes (church building only)
Internal Alteration Controls:	Yes (church building only)
Tree Controls:	No
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	No
Prohibited Uses May Be Permitted:	Yes

Extent of Heritage Overlay

It is recommended that the heritage overlay apply to the whole site.

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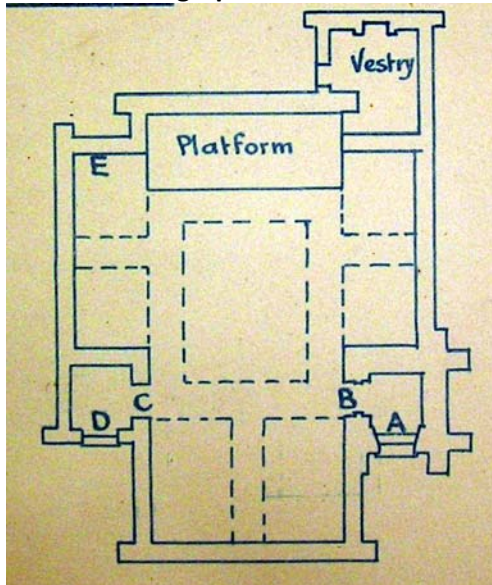
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A. Willingham, 'Davidson, Alexander (1839-1908)' in G. Forth, G. Critchett & P. Yule (eds.), *The biographical dictionary of the western district of Victoria*, Hyland House, South Melbourne, 1998, pp.30-32.

A. Willingham, *Narrapumelop and the Lions of Wickliff*, Allan Willingham, Melbourne, 1987.

A. Willingham, *Two Scots in Victoria: The Architecture of Davidson and Henderson*, M. Arch. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1983.

Historical Photographs



Board of Public Health, Floor plan of the Rokewood Presbyterian Church, 1904. Source: VRPS7882/P1, Unit 747, Public Record Office Victoria.



Rokewood Presbyterian Church, c.1947. Source: Leigh Historical Society.



Mrs Beatrice Harridge with her dog, 'Laddie', Smythesdale, c.1925. The Church of England church is in the background behind the tree. Source: Museum Victoria, reg. no. MM000294.

Current Photographs



Rokewood Presbyterian Church, rear (north) elevation showing projecting vestry.



Rokewood Presbyterian Church, side (east) elevation showing detailing of tower (the light stone below the ground floor windows is the memorial stone).



Detail of gable end showing Italian-pointed ventilator and stylised half-trefoil motif near the apex.



Detail of incised stylised trefoil motif in the end of a corbelling parapet cap.



Alan Bell Memorial Hall at the rear of the church.



Church interior, looking north towards chancel.



Church interior, roof detail.



Church interior, looking south.



Marble memorial table to Nairne Guthrie Elder.



Memorial Plaque to Thomas Russell.



Memorial plaque to Anna Louisa Russell.



Memorial Plaque to John Nairne Elder.