

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

Name Axedale Catholic Cemetery
Address 2050 McIvor Highway AXEDALE **Grading** 2008 Local
Building Type Cemetery/Graveyard/Burial Ground
Assessment by Context Pty Ltd



Recommended Heritage Protection VHR No HI No PS Yes

Maker / Builder No information held

Integrity

High

History and Historical Context

History of the Shire of Strathfieldsaye

The land around the former Shires of Strathfieldsaye and McIvor had a long history prior to the arrival of Europeans. The Jaara Jaara people are the original inhabitants of the area.

The area around Port Phillip was explored by Sir Thomas Mitchell, the Surveyor General of New South Wales, and a large party in 1836, on the homeward leg of a journey to Portland Bay. Impressed by what he perceived as the bounty of the land, Mitchell named the area *Australia Felix*.^[1]

The Port Phillip district was opened up for settlement soon thereafter, and much of the land in the Western districts of Victoria, including the former Shires of McIvor and Strathfieldsaye, was subsequently dominated by a series of pastoral runs. Most of the area around the town of Axedale and the numerous small towns in its vicinity was licensed to David Jennings as part of the Campaspe Plains run. The run covered an area of more than 144,900 acres and was populated with an estimated 12,000 sheep. A portion of Campaspe Plains was licensed to A. Jennings and George Playne in 1840 and the

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67,000 acre station became known as Axedale. In the coming decade the holders of the license changed a number of times. By the time the leasehold over the land was cancelled in 1865, the run had greatly reduced in size.[2]

Following the cancellation of leasehold, land holdings were of a smaller scale and pastoralists were gradually overtaken by farmers. The discovery of gold at Bendigo and the surrounding areas changed the face of the district and brought about new patterns of settlement and expansion. William John Bulling claimed to be the first man to discover gold at McIvor, and he was granted a £400 reward for the find. By 1853, over one hundred prospectors had assembled at Wild Duck Creek in the hopes of striking it rich. This number expanded the following year, and included some 2,000 Chinese immigrants.[3]

The Strathfieldsaye Road District was proclaimed in the Government Gazette on the 12th August 1861, and encompassed within it the parishes of Axedale, Strathfieldsaye, Eppalock, Mandurang, Sedgwick and Lyell.[4] The process of election of the board was punctuated by rivalries between Catholic and Protestant faiths, a characteristic of the district which infiltrates much of its history. Strathfieldsaye met the criterion prescribed to become a Shire in 1863, a transition that was officially proclaimed on the 17th September of that year.[5]

In 1864, Strathfieldsaye Shire was divided into three wards; Mandurang, Strathfieldsaye and Axedale.[6]

History of Axedale

The plan of the township of Axedale, with its characteristic crescent ends, was laid out circa 1856. Axedale was included in the district of Mandurang and under the control of the Strathfieldsaye Roads Board. Patrick Drake had built the Campaspe Hotel in 1855, and by 1865, the district had developed to the extent that it was able to support a further six hotels.[7] Goldfields were typically rough and lawless places, and hotels were big business in their midst. Patterns of settlement continued to reflect the status of Axedale as a centre of support for surrounding farm lands and mining pursuits, and by the 1860s, there were some 500 residents.[8]

Axedale was proclaimed a district on the 20th August 1861, and then a Shire on the 25th September 1866.[9] Much of the population of Axedale was of Irish origin, and tensions between Catholics and Protestants were articulated through the establishment and development of separate facilities for both religions. Facilities in the town were established to cater for, or became associated with, either the Catholic or Protestant communities, so much so that Axedale duplicated its cemeteries, hotels and schools in order to cater for both sectors.[10]

Religious facilities were first established in Axedale with the opening of the St. Mary's Catholic Church in Axedale in 1862. The Catholics also ran a school from the Church, catering for the children of waves of settlers that continued to arrive in the area. By the end of the 1860s, pressure from the Common School Committee led to their acquisition of Crown Land, which was gazetted as the site for the Axedale Common School in 1869. The school opened in 1871.[11] Alongside the establishment of religious and educational facilities was the construction of the Axedale Police Station, which opened in 1866.

The rich soils of the Campaspe River allowed for the continuation of farming as a mainstay for the area. Alongside the maintenance of agricultural and pastoral pursuits, residents of Axedale developed other industries. Naphthali Ingham established a bluestone quarry on his land in the 1860s, and a further quarry was opened in by Riley, Brazier and Nelson in 1905.[12] Vineyards and orchards were important developments in the district.

Development of the district and its industries were further enhanced with the construction of the railway from Bendigo to Heathcote, which opened in 1884. The railway was vital means of connecting a number of small towns in the district. The station at Axedale was opened on the 1st October 1888, and continued to be serviced until its closure during the Second World War.[13]

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In the 1930s, construction of a weir at the Campaspe River was commenced, though work was suspended at the height of the depression.[14] Proximity to Lake Eppalock, constructed in 1960-65, also proved a source of employment for the town.[15]

The marked development of the region culminated in the decision in 1994 to amalgamate the Shire of Strathfieldsaye with nearby Shires to form the City of Greater Bendigo.

History of Axedale Catholic Cemetery

The Axedale Catholic Cemetery stands upon ground that was purchased from the Crown by Reverend Dr. Henry Backhaus on the 11th June 1866. Backhaus bought Crown Allotment 10 of Section 9 for the purpose of establishing an exclusively Catholic cemetery there, and it developed very much as a separate entity to the adjacent general cemetery, which had been gazetted in 1864.[16] The block had been advertised for sale at the price of £3 per acre and Backhaus paid a total price of £26/14/3 for the site, which covered an area of just over 8 acres.

Backhaus was the owner of substantial land in the vicinity of Axedale. George Henry Backhaus was born in Prussia in 1811 and undertook his studies to join the priesthood in Rome, where he was ordained in 1835. He worked for a time in Ireland and then India, Singapore and Batavia before travelling to Australia after a lapse in health in the mid 1840s.[17] He had arrived in Melbourne from Adelaide in 1852, and, after working for a short time for the Vicar General, proceeded to the goldfields.

Backhaus was soon thereafter appointed the first Catholic priest for the goldfields, and he held his first mass in Sandhurst on the 2nd May 1852.[18] He conducted services in what were undoubtedly rudimentary facilities in various townships and diggings during the 1850s. In 1867, Backhaus was awarded the title of Vicar General for the newly formed Diocese of Sandhurst. He was responsible for the development of Catholic facilities of worship and education in many of the small towns throughout the goldfields. In 1859 he had erected slab and canvas school house for the emerging community of Axedale.[19]

Spurred by the gold rushes, Axedale had a large Irish Catholic population, and it was in acknowledgement of this that Backhaus purchased the land for the cemetery. It remained a private facility though the Department of Health required that the Catholic Church seek permission for each burial conducted there. The first burial at the cemetery is recorded as that of Margaret Conroy, who died on the 30th September 1868, at thirty six years of age. Many of the oldest tombstones in the cemetery date from the 1870s.[20]

It is assumed that the stone wall at the cemetery was built some time in the 1860s. The construction of dry stone walls in Victoria was largely undertaken by immigrants who had gained some familiarity with the skill in their home countries. The construction of stone walls was common from the period after the 1840s, and bands of wall builders were often employed to carry out the work.[21] Large scale wall building was initially associated with surveys of squatters' preemptive rights in the 1840s, and dry stone walls were constructed as a means of creating small holding paddocks for stock or define the boundaries of a property. [22]

Stone walls were increasingly common after the 1860s, with increasing land sales and the introduction of the Selection Act, after which land selection carried with it the proviso of improving the land. Stone walls were built in conjunction with the selection of land and were pegged out and constructed in accordance with surveyors' specifications. Gary Vines has suggested that stone walls in the Western districts of Victoria were largely constructed after the 1850s, and began in conjunction with initial land sales in the district.[23] In areas where stone was readily available, construction of a dry stone wall was only marginally more expensive than a fence. The availability of cheap labour in the 1860s increased the frequency of stone wall construction, as labour often proved the only cost in stone wall construction.[24] By the 1880s, the frequency of stone wall construction had been reduced, as new materials and the increased cost of labour decreased the viability of this method.

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- [1] Randell, J. O. (1985). *McIvor: A History of the Shire and the Township of Heathcote*, Shire of McIvor, p. 1.
- [2] Spreadborough, Robert and Anderson, Hugh (1983). *Victorian Squatters*, Red Rooster Press, Ascot Vale, p. 150
- [3] Spreadborough and Anderson, (1983), p. 31.
- [4] Hewat, Tim (1983), *Bridge Over Troubled Waters, A History of the Shire of Strathfieldsaye*, Shire of Strathfieldsaye, Victoria, pp. 11 - 12.
- [5] Hewat, Tim (1983), p. 18.
- [6] Hewat, Tim (1983), p. 107.
- [7] Whitworth, Robert P. (1879). *Bailliere's Victorian Gazeteer and Road Guide*, F. F. Bailliere, Melbourne, p. 17.
- [8] Centenary and Back to Axedale Committee (1970), *Accent on Axedale*, Axedale, Victoria, p. 8.
- [9] Centenary and Back to Axedale Committee (1970), p. 21.
- [10] Earth Tech Engineering Pty Ltd (2002), *Heathcote - Strathfieldsaye Thematic History*, City of Greater Bendigo, Bendigo, p. 10.
- [11] Centenary and Back to Axedale Committee (1970),, p. 16.
- [12] Centenary and Back to Axedale Committee (1970), p. 21.
- [13] Centenary and Back to Axedale Committee (1970), p. 28.
- [14] Hewat, Tim (1983), p. 115.
- [15] Heritage Victoria, (n.d), *Eppalock Weir*, Hermes entry 6482
- [16] Gladwin, Frances (1997), *Axedale Cemetery: historical report*, the author, Axedale, Victoria, p. 1.
- [17] Ebsworth, Rev. Walter (1973), *Pioneer Catholic Victoria*, The Polding Press, Melbourne, p. 163.
- [18] Gladwin, Frances (1997), p. 3.
- [19] Ebsworth, Rev. Walter (1973), p. 163.
- [20] Frances Gladwin (1997), p. 3.
- [21] Vines, Gary (1990). *Built to Last: An historical and archeological survey of Dry Stone Walls on Melbourne's Western Region*, Melbourne's Living Museum of the West Inc, Melbourne, p. 13.
- [22] Vines, Gary (1990), p. 16.
- [23] Vines, Gary (1990), p. 17.

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[24] Vines, Gary (1990), p. 19.

Primary sources

Whitworth, Robert P. (1879). *Bailliere's Victorian Gazeteer and Road Guide*, F. F. Bailliere, Melbourne.

Secondary sources

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Relevant Historical Australian Themes

8 Building Community Life.

8.6 Marking the phases of life.

Description

Physical Description

Axedale Catholic cemetery is located on the outskirts of the town and adjacent to the Axedale General Cemetery. It is rare to find two cemeteries close together and in particular one that is reserved for the exclusive use of Roman Catholics. The Catholic cemetery is notable for its stone wall encircling the place. This may have been constructed as a dry stone wall however the stones are now mortared into place. The manner in which this is done indicates that it may have been a later addition. The cemetery contains many graves and monuments, including a small stone mausoleum.

Physical Condition

Good

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Conservation Policy

Guidelines (Specific)

The following specific conservation actions are recommended, should the opportunity arise:

Conservation of the stone walls.

Comparative Analysis

Other cemeteries include the Heathcote-Redcastle and Axedale Cemetery adjacent. The Catholic cemetery at Axedale is a fine example, particularly the stone wall surrounding the cemetery.

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The Axedale Catholic Cemetery, on Cemetery Road and McIvor Highway, established by Reverend Dr. Henry Backhaus in 1866, including the stone wall surrounding the cemetery.

How is it significant?

The Axedale Catholic Cemetery is of historic, aesthetic and social significance to the City of Greater Bendigo.

Why is it significant?

Historically, for its associations with Rev. Backhaus, who was the first Catholic priest for the goldfields and later the Vicar General for the newly formed Diocese of Sandhurst, as well as a substantial landowner in the Axedale district. Backhaus purchased the land for use as a Catholic Cemetery with his own funds; it remains a private facility. Also as tangible evidence of the large Irish Catholic population in Axedale from the 1860s, attracted by the gold rushes. This chapter of Axedale's history is recorded in its headstones. (Criterion H, A)

The fact that Axedale has a Catholic Cemetery is highly unusual and demonstrates both the wealth and influence of Dr Backhaus, and the depth of the sectarian divide in Axedale.(Criterion B)

Aesthetically, for demonstrating the art of the stone mason in the memorials, many of which date from the 1870s. Also for the stone wall around the cemetery - demonstrating the art brought by new emigrants from their home countries. (Criterion E)

Axedale Catholic cemetery is still in use and as such has social significance to the Axedale community. (Criterion G)

Assessment Against Criteria

HERCON CRITERIA

Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history. *Criterion A*

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Possession of uncommon rare or endangers aspects of our cultural or natural history. *Criterion B*

Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history. *Criterion C*

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments. *Criterion D*

Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics. *Criterion E*

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

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

Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history. *Criterion H*

Recommendations 2008

External Paint Controls

Yes

Internal Alteration Controls

No

Tree Controls

No

Fences & Outbuildings

Yes

Prohibited Uses May Be Permitted

No

Incorporated Plan

None Specified

Aboriginal Heritage Place

No

Other Recommendations

It is recommended that the Axedale Catholic Cemetery at Cemetery Road and McIvor Highway, be retained as an individual place to the Heritage Overlay of the City of Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme with the schedule entry as shown above. The extent of registration is the whole of the property as defined by the title boundaries.