Ballaarat Conservation Study

RICHARD AITKEN, is a member of the Jacobs Lewis Vines team which has been responsible for a number of conservation studies in Victoria. The Ballaarat exercise commenced as a conservation study and gradually grew in complexity, largely through the enthusiasm of the City Council and its officers. As a result Ballaarat can be now seen as something of a model in terms of conservation planning.

As a provincial centre in Victoria, Ballarat has long occupied a unique place. Its early importance as a mining centre lasted until early this century. Much of its wealth from the discovery and exploitation of gold was expressed by the erection of grand structures; especially public buildings, banks, hotels and other infrastructure systems such as the railway facilities, water supply, and later the city's tramway network. However, it was the additional expression of civic pride in the art gallery, the botanic gardens, the numerous statues and plantations that distinguished Ballarat from other similar centres.

Fortunately much of this legacy is still intact. Given the current interest in conservation it was natural that Ballarat should be the subject of some form of investigation into the importance and extent of the buildings and works that contribute to the city's special character.
Early in 1978 Ballarat was selected to receive funding for a conservation study. This was provided jointly by the City of Ballarat, the Historic Buildings Preservation Council and the Australian Heritage Commission. The brief, similar to that for the recently completed Central Business District (Melbourne) Studies, called for investigation of buildings and areas in the inner area of Ballarat and recommendations regarding the buildings and areas thus identified.

Melbourne architects Jacobs Lewis Vines were appointed to undertake the study and survey work commenced in April 1978. One hundred and seventy buildings (or groups of buildings) were selected for investigation and of these, seventy one were recommended for addition to the Historic Buildings Register. Included in this number were thirteen buildings already on the Historic Buildings Register and a further six State owned buildings were referred to the Government Buildings Advisory Council. All buildings investigated were recommended for addition to the Register of the National Estate and for possible protection under the Third Schedule of the Town and Country Planning Act 1961 (clause 8).

Fortunately the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act also allow for protection of areas of special significance; therefore forty-one areas were delineated and recommended for protection. These areas were ones which contained important groups of buildings or a number of individual buildings of architectural and historical significance as well as other notable characteristics such as intact bluestone gutters, mature trees and gardens, lack of intrusive development, and vistas to other important parts of the city. Because of their especial significance, five of these areas were also recommended for addition to the Register of the National Estate.

There were many areas which did not meet the rigid criteria adopted. This did not mean however that remaining areas were unimportant. Thirty-one additional areas were delineated for special consideration by the Ballarat City Council in development control procedures.

Due to the extraordinary richness of Ballarat's architectural heritage and the limits on fundings for the study, it was only possible to survey the city's inner area. Thus the Ballarat Conservation Study recommended that the outer areas of Ballarat should be surveyed when funds were available to complete the identification of buildings and areas of the entire municipality.
During 1979, funding equal to that for the first part of the Ballarat Conservation Study was made available by the City, the HBPC and Heritage Commission. In January 1980, Jacobs Lewis Vines were appointed consultants for the second stage of the study and survey work for the remaining parts of the municipality commenced.

The brief for the Ballarat Conservation Study Part Two called for the completion of the survey work, preparation of conservation guidelines and production of a published work summarising both parts of the conservation study.

The later survey work identified an additional fifty-six buildings, of which ten were recommended for addition to the Historic Buildings Register, and nineteen for the Register of the National Estate. An addendum to Part One of the study identified a further five buildings and works omitted from the original study. These included the remarkable garden
at 111 Webster Street (identified in Peter Watts, 'Historic Gardens Study', 1980) and the surviving cages of the former Ballarat Zoological Gardens (to the north of the present botanic gardens).

The Ballarat Conservation Guidelines, published in 1981, are intended to provide advice to the City Council, building owners and occupiers. They are divided into a number of chapters, each dealing with a different aspect of Ballarat's buildings and areas. The chapters discuss commercial and residential buildings, both existing and new developments. In particular, comments were made regarding materials, building forms, alterations to contributory buildings, setbacks and heights of new development and brief notes about architectural styles and periods.

Elsewhere, reference is made to the railways, cemeteries, botanic gardens, Lake Wendouree and features such as council street works, landscaping, fences and paving.

In addition, an appendix gives a case study of the important Lydiard Street-Camp Street Precinct, with detailed recommendations and comments on development opportunities and possible policy decisions affecting the area.

As a supplement of these guidelines, a Register of Restoration Tradesmen and Components was also prepared to assist the city council in dealing with queries from building owners and occupiers undertaking work on architecturally and historically significant buildings. Although many Melbourne firms were listed emphasis was placed on local tradesmen capable of undertaking this kind of work in an endeavour to create a local awareness of the importance of conservation issues.

The book, Ballarat: A Guide to Buildings and Areas 1851-1940, is due to be released in December 1981. It is being published jointly by Jacobs Lewis Vines and the City of Ballarat. A brief historical introduction opens the book and a section entitled The Case for Conservation extols the virtues of conservation and the need for the people of Ballarat, and especially its council, to wisely manage the areas of architectural and historical significance which contribute to Ballarat's national importance as a grand Victorian city.
The bulk of the book is a summary of the buildings and areas identified in the *Ballarat Conservation Study*. Detailed descriptions are given for the most important buildings, and short introductory essays describe the significant areas. It is hoped that this book will reach a large audience, and create a public awareness of the importance of Ballarat and the need for conservation measures there and elsewhere.

Following the successful architectural advisory services operated by the Department of Planning at Maldon, Beechworth, Yackandandah, Chiltern and Queenscliff, funding has been made available for a similar bureau at Ballarat. This is the culmination of probably the most comprehensive conservation investigation ever undertaken in an Australian town.
Extending over a four year period, some two hundred and thirty buildings were investigated and a total of seventy-seven areas were delineated, of which forty three were recommended for some form of statutory protection.

It is pleasing to note that the City of Ballarat is currently amending its planning scheme. It is proposed to register seventy four buildings, giving them statutory protection within the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act. Also, the important Lydiard Street precinct is to be included. This will open the way for the other areas identified in the Ballarat Conservation Study to be included, and thus given protection.

APPENDIX

REPORTS AND PUBLISHED WORKS, MENTIONED IN THE TEXT, AND COMPRISING THE BALLARAT CONSERVATION STUDY

Jacobs Lewis Vines, *Ballarat Conservation Study (Part One)*. commissioned by the City of Ballarat, the Historic Buildings Preservation Council and the Australian Heritage Commission, 2 vols., Melbourne, September 1978. (Volume One contains a brief historical background; recommendations and all material relating to the areas. Volume Two contains the building inventory, bibliography and a number of appendices).

Jacobs Lewis Vines, *Ballarat Conservation Study Part Two*, commissioned by the City of Ballarat, Australian Heritage Commission, Historic Buildings Preservation Council, Melbourne, 1980. (contains recommendation for buildings and areas in those parts of the City of Ballarat not surveyed in Part One as well as an addenda of five additional buildings from the initial survey area.)

