

SPECIMEN COTTAGE

BENDIGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

Interpretation Plan - reimagining the visitor experience

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Executive Summary

This Plan creates a framework to re-imagine the visitor experience and revitalise the Cottage. It aims to establish the Cottage as a relevant attractive tourist destination in the modern market.

The Plan also aims to create a facility where locals will be able to recognise their own lives and history. With an expanded tourist market in mind, the Plan will help create a facility where tourists will be able to understand, reflect on and relate to the nature and rhythms of life in Bendigo over the past 150 years. However the Plan also calls for recognition of the Indigenous people of the region.

The Interpretation Plan is not a design for exhibits. It is a framework that the BHS can build on to develop local stories clustered around some key themes that visitors can use to enhance their understanding of Bendigo and district.

In broad terms, most of the spaces discussed in this plan conform in part to current use. However much of the current exhibition material will need to be reviewed with new themes in mind. It is proposed to remove or reallocate some existing items into rooms with stronger themes. There are 4 themed exhibition spaces in this new proposal. For example, Room 10 has a current thrust about mining. It is proposed to maintain and strengthen this theme by redesigning and clustering mining items from other rooms into this new space – as well as selecting more appropriate items from Nolan Street.

As mentioned earlier, interpretation is the means by which the Specimen Cottage will communicate with its visitors. This is integral to making the collections accessible, relevant and understood. The Interpretation Plan will act as a guide to ensure that all interpretation meets the specific and defined needs of the visitors.

While it is recognised that many of the proposed solutions will require financial assistance, volunteers can undertake a large proportion of the work relating to content. This means that the intensive work relating to thematic interpretation and storytelling using the collection can begin if agreement is reached regarding the thrust of the new themes.

The current collection items on exhibition could be better displayed in order to provide visitors with a more valuable experience. The major deficiency is the lack of quality information about the objects and their context in relation to the history or people of Bendigo.

While some items are grouped together, once again the information about them is limited or non-existent. At the moment many of the exhibits are not much more than a collection of interesting objects from the past, depending on who is looking at them. Key themes with the potential for storytelling have been suggested in this plan. Objects can be identified and interpretive information, including photographs, could be sourced and prepared by BHS volunteers.

'Busy' or crowded exhibitions can be useful in telling particular types of stories; for example a large display of many domestic items can show the range of items in use at any one time. However it has been shown that when selected items can be highlighted as belonging to a particular person and that person's life can be explored, audiences are better informed and leave with a more knowledge and a better experience.

Major recommendations

1. Agreement that Specimen Cottage is a facility to exhibit the BHS collection.
2. An Exhibition Committee to be established with position of Honorary Curator created.
3. Review of all labels with view to replacement with interpretive text, or simple object labels.
4. A uniform text and label style to be adopted.
5. All items are to be donated to Bendigo Historical Society Inc.
6. All items when not on display to be stored at Nolan Street.
7. Specimen Cottage should not be a repository for collection items.
8. Procedures for accepting items into the BHS collection must be followed.
9. Inward loans for specific exhibitions could be sought if existing collection is deficient.
10. Standard procedures for inward loans must be followed.
11. Exhibition Committee should make final selection of items for display.
12. Items must not be added or removed from exhibitions without permission of the Curator.

List of proposed uses for rooms.¹

No.	Existing use	Proposed use
1	Side entrance	Side entrance (no change)
2	Temp exhibition	Theme: Town and Country ² (change to long term display)
3	Temp exhibition & sales	Theme: Welcome to Bendigo (change to long term display)
4	Passage	Passage (no change)
5	Office	Office & Sales (change to also sell merchandise)
6&7	Washroom and Toilet	Washroom and Toilet (no change)
8	Kitchen	Kitchen (no change)
9	Reading Room	Work Room & Meeting Space (change)
10	Mining Room	Theme: Quartzopolis! (change to long term display)
11	Storage	Storage (no change)
12	Display & storage	Reading Room & Storage (change)
13	Temp exhibition	Theme: Living a Life in Bendigo (change to long term display)

Summary of the next stages:

1. Discussion and approval of direction of Interpretation Plan.
2. Establish exhibition team.
3. Select collection objects, images etc based on themes, develop stories and text.
4. Begin design for each room.
5. Develop cost plan.
6. Identify potential sponsorship or other assistance.

¹ Room numbers follow floor plan that formed part of plan by Frontier Heritage 10/08/2015 Drawing No.A-O1

² Themes are only suggestions

Mission Statement (BHS)³

The BHS aims to collect, preserve, and provide a place for documents, records and artefacts relating to the history of Bendigo, and to foster research into the many aspects of this history. We will acquire, research, conserve, interpret and exhibit material that illustrates this history.

Purpose of Specimen Cottage

The Cottage is the 'front of house' for the BHS collections. While recognising its limitations, the Cottage provides a central city space to exhibit selected heritage material from the collections.

Statement of Purposes, BHS (Objectives)⁴

1. To encourage the study of history, especially the history of Bendigo,
2. To promote the compilation and presentation of authentic records relating to Bendigo,
3. To promote historical research,
4. To acquire by purchase or donation or by way of loan all such objects and materials as have bearing on the history of Bendigo and to establish, furnish and maintain libraries and museums to house and preserve the same,
5. To accept gifts of money or chattels whether testamentary or otherwise,
6. To promote interchange of information among members of the Association by lectures, readings, discussions, excursions and exhibitions of objects of historical significance,
7. To publish books and papers of historical interest,
8. To raise funds for maintenance of Society property and to further its interests,
9. To establish and carry on rooms for the above purposes of the Society,
10. To subscribe to, become a member of and/or co-operate with any other association, club or organization, whether incorporated or not, whose objects are altogether or in part similar to those of the Association.

Purpose and scope of the Interpretation Plan

The Plan will describe the ways the museum will use spaces to present its collection and stories to the visitors. It will propose some themes, topics and stories. The Plan deals only with the exhibition opportunities at Specimen Cottage.

Key Topics, Themes and Stories

The collection is built around the following themes:⁵

1. Domestic life
2. Education
3. Local People
4. Recreation and social life
5. Local industry
6. Working life
7. Religion
8. Ethnic groups
9. Services
10. Transport
11. Built environment

³ Bendigo Historical Society Inc. Volunteer Information, January 2018

⁴ Ibid

⁵ BHS Collection Policy Draft, September 2018

Suggestions for thematic approach: (see table on page 9)

1. Welcome to Bendigo
2. Town and Country
3. 'Quartzopolis!'
4. Living a Life in Bendigo

Timeframe:

From the first European presence in Bendigo region to the present time⁶. This should be revisited to include an Indigenous section.

Geographic boundaries:

The City of Greater Bendigo, keeping in mind other areas have their own historical society and collections.

Key identities:

Brieley, Vahland , Montez, Panton, Sullivan, (more here), especially women

Target Audience

1. Local community
2. Tourists & visitors
3. School groups
4. Service groups
5. Local historians

The following table sets out practical audience segmentation according to lifecycle, interests and geography

Common audience segments

Locals/regional	Tourists/travellers
Children with family	Children with family
Children school/preschool	
Young adults	Young adults
Adults with family	Adults with family
Adults, no children	Adults, no children
Seniors	Seniors
Special interest groups – educators, tour groups, artists, sports enthusiasts, collectors, community groups, special needs, etc	Special interest groups – educators, tour groups, artists, sports enthusiasts, collectors, community groups, special needs etc
Cultural community	Cultural community
Tertiary students	
Stakeholders: volunteers, members, etc	

Success factors for Museum programs

This section outlines key factors that underlie appeal to common audience segments. Stimulating and relevant themes, stories and objects are vital for all audience segments.

⁶ BHS Collection Policy Draft, September 2018

Children with families (local and tourist)

Hands on activities. Physical activities. Safe indoor and outdoor area associated with the facility.
Narrative approach.

Children with school

Hands on activities. Physical activities. Safe (contained) indoor and outdoor area associated with the facility. Links to curriculum and classroom activities.

Young adults

Topics and presentation are edgy, dynamic, contemporary or forward looking, horizon expanding or offer some scope for self-expression. Young adults often show considerable interest in dramatic themes and stories. (Considerable research has been undertaken on the subjects sought by young adults in focus groups for Australian museums).

Adults with families

Hands on activities that engage the children along with adult-level material that engages the adults. Safe environment with easy visual supervision.

Adults, no children

Adult-level material, venue not dominated by children

Seniors

Adult-level material, venue not dominated by children. Seniors often show special interest in historical material relating to period of childhood and youth. They appreciate programs that do not require them to be on their feet too long.

Aims of Interpretation Plan

1. Increase the number of visitors coming to Specimen Cottage
2. Encourage visits from a new or specific audience
3. Increase the length of time visitors spend in Specimen Cottage
4. Encourage activity, interaction and enjoyment
5. To support audience development strategies of Specimen Cottage
6. Ensure the safety and security of heritage objects on display at Specimen Cottage

Key interpretive devices

1. Create a number of stronger themed areas on the site.
2. Strong system of interpretive 'sign posts'
3. Develop a consistent orientation by volunteers, including a 'uniform' for volunteers.
4. Tell as many local stories as possible.
5. Use of images with text and labels where appropriate.
6. Create space around selected items to allow visitors to experience those objects and learn more about them.

Interpretive media

Media	Advantages	Disadvantages
Graphic panels	Need no supervision Can reach large audiences Low maintenance Easy for most visitors to use Combine pictures and text Can create emotional impact Can help orientate visitors	Too many can be overwhelming Some people ignore them

Guided tours	Very effective Contain more than text panels Flexible/responsive Can present complex stories	Reach small audience Needs marketing and admin
Publications	Used on & off site Contain more than text panel Aid orientation	Must be distributed somehow Regular reprint costs Can become litter
Audio tour	Can be multi-lingual Use narratives to tell story Create characters	Isolates users from each other Relatively expensive Health/hygiene issues
Computer interactive, or use of smart phone	Encourages interaction Modern feel Can be used off site Creative use of text & images	Expensive to install Expensive to maintain Can date quickly
Historical items	Can be draw-card Wow factor Can be lit to great effect Orientate visitors Visitors like real things Can provide unique experience	

Implementation Approach

The widely adopted definition of interpretation in the museum context is:

The process of engaging with visitors and users to create understanding.

The Interpretive Plan will be underpinned by *five objectives* that will be utilised to guide decision-making and to benchmark progress.

1. **Physical** – create a destination that is altered and improved to such a degree that it can be freshly promoted as an enhanced experience that needs to be revisited.
2. **Engagement** – provide a deeper and more emotive experience for visitors.
3. **Conceptual** – introduce a stronger ‘Bendigo’ narrative to engage more effectively with more markets (local, educational, interstate, international).
4. **Commercial** – create a proposition that is more attractive to commercial partners.
5. **Collaborative** – engage more effectively with stakeholders and the community to assist with promotional and other activities.

The Plan leads to a design process that will describe how SC will present its collection and stories to the visitors. It will develop the themes, topics and stories and will address the following:

1. **Wayfinding**, ensuring that the layout works for visitors:
2. **Appeal**, develop specific areas of high visitor appeal
3. **Impact**, ensure that there are points of high impact
4. **Message**, ensure that the messages are well communicated
5. **Design**, ensure objects, graphics, labels, screens, interactive and lighting work well

The Plan and the design process will use the following *three principles* to guide the development and use of interpretive media.

1. **Learn** – what do we want visitors to learn? (ideas, connections, facts, names, dates)
2. **Understand** – what do we want visitors to understand? (the nature or meaning)
3. **Feel** – what do we want visitors to feel? (emotion, empathy)

Summary of proposed changes to functions of rooms and exhibits in Specimen Cottage.

Purpose of space/exhibit Room 1	Works required	Interpretation devices
South side entrance It is proposed that this space remains unchanged.	Not required.	Not required.

Purpose of space/exhibit Room 2	Works required	Interpretation devices
Exhibition Theme: Town & Country It is proposed to develop a theme that can use the collection and knowledge of BHS people to display items and tell stories to allow visitors to gain a deeper understanding of how Bendigo developed into a civic powerhouse – using sub themes such as: <i>education, agriculture, religion, sports, arts, health, multiculturalism, home life, a regional hub, (past & present) and infrastructure.</i>	<p>Remove exhibits not relevant to new theme: such as, framed photos or prints, selected books, model of tin mine, block of wood, Japanese woven boat, heirloom case items.</p> <p>Mining material (mostly pictures) could be clustered into room 10.</p> <p>Remove dressing table.</p> <p>Use best existing showcases for stories to be told. Maybe reorganise location of some showcases.</p> <p>Exhibition team to develop stories, select items and prepare text and labels.</p> <p>Keep window clear.</p> <p>Statutory signage.</p>	<p>Develop display around theme.</p> <p>Edit some material from selected DVDs to run on small flat screens.</p> <p>Major theme panel (with photos or illustrations).</p> <p>Key text quotes from historic and contemporary people.</p> <p>Key images.</p> <p>Object labels.</p> <p>Follow model for text and labels.</p> <p>Acknowledgement of donors and supporters.</p>

Purpose of space/exhibit Room 3	Works required	Interpretation devices
<p>Meet & Greet/Exhibition</p> <p>Theme: Welcome to Bendigo</p> <p>It is proposed to develop this room as a meet and greet space as well as an exhibition theme that can use the collection and knowledge of BHS people to display a <i>timeline history of Bendigo</i>, including indigenous stories.</p> <p>This is where the story of Specimen Cottage will also be told.</p>	<p>Remove current exhibits including framed photos and prints.</p> <p>Remove furniture & filing cabinet.</p> <p>Use existing showcases if appropriate for stories to be told. (maybe from other rooms).</p> <p>Remove tourism material. Install some better quality furniture for visitors if possible. (in centre of room).</p> <p>Exhibition team to develop stories, select items and prepare text and labels.</p> <p>Design space to achieve best use as a public space with new theme in mind.</p> <p>Statutory signage.</p> <p>Keep window and doorway clear.</p>	<p>Mostly graphics and small number of relevant objects in discreet showcases, especially with some indigenous items.</p> <p>Part of the <i>meet and greet</i> should be for volunteers to gain an understanding of the visitors' interests.</p> <p>A large photo-mural of Bendigo landscapes with overlay text: Welcome to Bendigo: <i>Explore our History</i>.</p> <p>Major theme panels (with photos or illustrations).</p> <p>Key text quotes from historic and contemporary people.</p> <p>Key images.</p> <p>Acknowledgement of donors and supporters.</p>

Purpose of space/exhibit Room 4	Works required	Interpretation devices
<p>Entrance Hallway</p> <p>It is proposed to maintain this space as a transition space for movement between new work/meeting room/kitchen & office.</p>	<p>Remove framed works.</p> <p>Statuary notices to be made prominent (fire escapes etc).</p>	<p>Not required, notice board can cause bottleneck.</p>

Purpose of space/exhibit Room 5	Works required	Interpretation devices
<p>Office & Sales</p> <p>It is proposed to keep the office function and add a sales point for BHS merchandise. General Bendigo tourism material will be very limited.</p> <p>Volunteer office and work space for research, cataloguing, digitisation etc.</p> <p>Casual meetings (2 or 3 people) can take place in this room.</p>	<p>Remove any collection items.</p> <p>Establish workspace with desks, tables and appropriate office technology, including internet access.</p> <p>Organise wall space for shelving and storage.</p>	Not required.

Purpose of space/exhibit Room 6 & 7 Toilet	Works required	Interpretation devices
<p>Toilet & washroom</p> <p>It is proposed to keep this space as current use.</p>	Not required.	Not required.

Purpose of space/exhibit Room 8	Works required	Interpretation devices
<p>Kitchen/food preparation</p> <p>It is proposed to keep this room as a kitchen and food preparation area.</p>	<p>'Staff only' on door.</p> <p>No collection items to be stored in this room.</p> <p>Statutory signage.</p>	Not required.

Purpose of space/exhibit Room 9	Works required	Interpretation devices
<p>Work room & meeting space</p> <p>It is proposed to convert this room to a 'back of house' space.</p> <p>This space can be used to prepare new exhibitions, a place to talk to potential donors and hold meetings.</p>	<p>Remove any collection items.</p> <p>Rationalise books, pamphlets and other paper records.</p> <p>Discard non essential material.</p> <p>Review paper items, retain high</p>	Not required.

A full set of BHS policy and procedure documents will be stored here ready to be used in discussion with potential donors or other visitors.	<p>priority and relocate to new Reading Room.</p> <p>Design shelving for storage.</p> <p>Establish meeting and workspace.</p> <p>'Staff only' on door.</p> <p>Statutory signage.</p> <p>Keep window and doorway clear.</p>	
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Purpose of space/exhibit Room 10	Works required	Interpretation devices
Exhibition Theme: Quartzopolis! <p>It is proposed to develop a theme that can use the collection and knowledge of BHS people to build on the current "gold" displays.</p> <p>Bendigo Creek was one of the biggest rushes in Australian history. Quartz mining at Peg Leg, Eaglehawk, New Chum, Hustlers Reef and many more led to Bendigo boasting the deepest gold mines in the world.</p> <p>It is proposed to add new relevant material from Nolan Street. Rich stories can be told about mines and miners from Chinese, American, German, English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh heritage that had descended on the gold fields to find their fortune.</p>	<p>Remove any collection items not to be used in new theme.</p> <p>Rationalise books, pamphlets and other paper records.</p> <p>Discard non essential material.</p> <p>Review paper items, retain high priority and relocate to new Reading Room.</p> <p>Exhibition team to develop stories, select items and prepare text and labels.</p> <p>Design space to achieve best use as a public space.</p> <p>Statutory signage.</p> <p>Keep window and doorway clear.</p>	<p>Showcases, objects, small multimedia screens.</p> <p>Large scale graphics will announce the theme while text and label panels will tell selected stories about the people engaged in mining over a number of years.</p> <p>Major theme panels (with photos or illustrations).</p> <p>Key text quotes from historic and contemporary people</p> <p>Key images.</p> <p>Acknowledgement of donors and supporters.</p>

Purpose of space/exhibit Room 12	Works required	Interpretation devices
Reading room & storage <p>It is proposed to convert this space into the Reading Room (in part replicate the current</p>	<p>Remove collection items.</p> <p>Remove redundant furniture and</p>	Not required.

<p>function). It doesn't appear to be heavily used so the staircase might not be a concern.</p> <p>This could be a <i>closed room</i> most of the time. When visitors or researchers need access to paper records, the room can be opened. It would be a quiet space for volunteers to workshop ideas for exhibitions, publications etc.</p>	<p>old paper posters etc.</p> <p>Design space to achieve best use as a research and reading room by installing shelving and appropriate desks or tables.</p> <p>Discard non essential material</p> <p>Statutory signage.</p>	
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Purpose of space/exhibit Room 13	Works required	Interpretation devices
<p>Exhibition</p> <p>Theme: Living a life in Bendigo</p> <p>It is proposed to develop a theme that can use the collection and knowledge of BHS people to tell stories about some of the thousands of ordinary people who toiled in the mines, foundries, shops, businesses, factories, homes and so on to transform this quiet and quiet valley into a thriving city.</p> <p>Great change swept through Bendigo like elsewhere – cars and planes became commonplace, economic depression and drought shattered the dreams of many and the balance between work and leisure changed forever.</p>	<p>Remove any collection items not to be used in new theme.</p> <p>Rationalise books, pamphlets and other paper records.</p> <p>Discard non essential material.</p> <p>Review paper items, retain high priority and relocate to new Reading Room.</p> <p>Exhibition team to develop stories, select items and prepare text and labels.</p> <p>Statutory signage.</p> <p>Keep windows and doorways clear.</p>	<p>Showcases, objects, small multimedia screens.</p> <p>Large scale graphics will announce the theme while text and label panels will tell selected stories.</p> <p>Major theme panels (with photos or illustrations).</p> <p>Key text quotes from historic and contemporary people.</p> <p>Key images.</p> <p>Acknowledgement of donors and supporters.</p>

