

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: MECHANICS INSTITUTE

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: corner Winter and Pilleau Streets COLERAINE

STUDY NUMBER: 003

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

PRECINCT: Coleraine

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

ALLOTMENT: 2 **SECTION:** 19 **PARISH:** PARISH OF COLERAINE

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

CFA 430J-17; Vicroads 228 C10.

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: Local



Coleraine Mechanics Institute, Whyte Street, Coleraine.

Image Date: 09/02/2002

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All the buildings, but excluding the interiors, and all of the land.

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: MECHANICS INSTITUTE

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: corner Winter and Pilleau Streets COLBRAINE

STUDY NUMBER: 003

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The Coleraine Mechanics Institute at Winter Street is a collection of connected structures. The single storey library building facing Winter Street was built in 1896 in the Renaissance Revival style. It is constructed of rendered brickwork with a hipped, corrugated iron roof, topped with an unusual cylindrical vent. A central segmental arched doorway is flanked on each side by a pair of segmental arched windows with moulded surrounds, treated as stilted arches on an intermediate cornice. Superimposed on the façade is a trabeated system of paired end pilasters, a podium and a moulded entablature. The entry is denoted by a portico with pilasters and columns in antis surmounted by a segmental curved pediment.

The main hall is constructed of timber and clad with ripple iron which is clearly visible at the rear. The corrugated iron hipped roof is topped with a lantern and the north side features a decorative gable. Internally the room is lined with decorative pressed metal work.

Unsympathetic alterations completed in 1977 include the enlargement of the hall on both sides as an extension of the main roof, and the addition of a kitchen and toilet block. The east wall of the meeting room has been clad in pseudo brick. Minor alterations have occurred in more recent years.

HISTORY:

The Mechanics Institute movement emerged in Scotland at the end of the eighteenth century. It quickly spread to London and the developing industrial cities of England in the first half of the nineteenth century. The movement succeeded best in Australia and that success was especially strong in colonial Victoria. This was due to a combination of social, economic and political factors, although the discussion of politics and religion was usually banned by an institute's regulations. Over a thousand institutes, some with associated free libraries and lecture halls, were built in the city and country. The first to be built was the Melbourne Athenaeum in 1848, the majority of examples were built in the 1860s and 1870s, and the last examples in the more remote parts of Victoria were built up to the outbreak of World War One or later. Although dominated by the middle class, the movement could cross class and religious divisions, often uniting a town in its aspiration, so that the construction of a mechanics institute represented not just a practical civic achievement but a real expression of shared cultural values.

The institutes were often supported financially and in kind by the surrounding 'gentry' while the true 'mechanics' were often excluded by rules, regulations and fees. Classicism was the invariable choice for an architectural style; however there is a great range in quality and interpretation.

The first Mechanics Institute in Coleraine was constructed in Whyte Street in 1869. It was a library of trade instruction and education for working men. (McGaffin, 22-3.) By the 1890s this building had become too small for the growing population of Coleraine, and in 1893 a competition was held for the design of a new Mechanics Institute. Because the competition followed the financial collapse of 1892, there were 43 entrants vying for the first prize of 7 guineas. The successful design for a substantial two storey building in the Renaissance Revival style was by Mr Robert M Schrieber from the office of Mr J E Bourke, architect, of Collins Street, Melbourne. (Troeth, 122)

After much debate, Allotment 2, Section 19 was purchased in 1894 as the site for a new Institute. (McGaffin, op cit) Because of the depressed economic conditions of the time, it was decided that the original design would be modified. In 1896, Henry Bradbury was contracted for a sum of 360 pounds to construct the ground level library and reading rooms, but not the upper storey (Troeth, 121, fig 5.6).

In October 1908 Leon Lesser, local storekeeper, was elected to the managing committee of the Coleraine

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: MECHANICS INSTITUTE

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: corner Winter and Pilleau Streets COLERAINE

STUDY NUMBER: 003

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

Mechanics Institute and retained this position for over 20 years (Stubblings, 84).

In 1905, Mr H James was contracted for a sum of 248 pounds to construct a timber and corrugated iron billiard room at the rear of the site (Troeth, 122). By this time, the Whyte Street building, being used as a public hall, was deemed to be too small, and a new hall was required. The design for a new hall was selected from competition submissions held in December 1908 (ibid). A bitter dispute, which went all the way to the Supreme Court of Victoria, then broke out over whether the existing site in Whyte Street should be redeveloped, or a new hall constructed on land in Winter Street behind the Library. The corrugated iron hall was constructed on the Winter Street site and was opened on May 25 1910 (ibid). A meeting room was also added on the Pilleau Street side, which has since been removed to a new location in Payne Street, Coleraine.

The Mechanics Institute functioned as an important education and social centre for the Coleraine community. Its importance as a public facility was enhanced by the fact that the local government authority did not construct a Town Hall for the use of its citizens. The buildings have witnessed a broad range of cultural activities including balls, plays, concerts, public lectures, and fetes. The library and reading room functioned as the town's lending library until the inception of the Regional Library Service in the 1960s. Many associations and clubs held their meetings in the meeting room and ran functions in the hall.

The Committee of the Mechanics Institute took over the picture show from Mr Neil McDonald of Hamilton on 2 March 1929, showing silent films, and later talkies. The hall operated as a cinema until 1961, raising sufficient funds to keep the buildings open and functioning, and funding for the library, throughout this period. Attendances at the cinema fell following the advent of television and the drive-in theatre at Hamilton, forcing its closure. In July 1962, the Committee of the Mechanics Institute handed over the site to the Wannan Shire Council (CHS file).

In 1977 extensive alterations to the buildings were carried out at a cost of \$48,000 (Hamilton Spectator 13/10/77). Minor changes have occurred in more recent years.

THEMATIC CONTEXT:

3. Developing local, regional and national economies
3.21 Entertaining for profit

6. Educating
6.1 Forming associations, libraries, and institutes for self-education

8. Developing Australia's cultural life
8.5 Forming associations
8.5.4 Pursuing common leisure interests
8.14 Living in the country and rural settlements

CONDITION:

The building is in good condition internally and externally

INTEGRITY:

Fair degree of integrity externally and internally.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

What is significant?

The Coleraine Mechanics Institute is a single storey rendered brick building located at the corner of Winter

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: MECHANICS INSTITUTE

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: corner Winter and Pilleau Streets COLERAINE

STUDY NUMBER: 003

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

and Pilleau Streets, two blocks south of the central activities area of Coleraine. The design is classical, and combines a trabeated and an arcuated system to delineate the façade. The building in Winter Street was built as a Library and Reading Room, to alleviate space constraints at the original Mechanics Institute in Whyte Street, which continued to function as the town's public hall for some years subsequently. A new public hall was built behind the Library and Reading Room at Winter Street, which opened with a gala evening on 25 May 1910. Various alterations and additions were made over the years, including the Supper Room on the south side of the main hall, and the timber and iron meeting room at the rear in 1905. The latter has since been relocated. The Mechanics Institute underwent substantial modifications in 1977, resulting in a number of unsympathetic brick additions including kitchen and toilet facilities.

How is it significant?

The Coleraine Mechanics Institute is of architectural, historical and social significance to the township of Coleraine.

Why is it significant?

The Coleraine Mechanics Institute is of architectural significance as a prominent landmark in Winter Street, and makes a major contribution to the townscape of Coleraine. Despite unsympathetic additions, the original Library and Reading Room survive as a finely executed example of the Renaissance Revival style, one of only three public buildings in Coleraine to demonstrate the style.

Coleraine Mechanics Institute is historically significant as the main setting for public events in the town since the early twentieth century, carrying on the tradition established in Whyte Street in 1869. The complex of buildings has served as the town's library and public reading room, public hall, meeting place for clubs and societies, recreation centre and cinema.

Coleraine Mechanics Institute is of social significance to the community of Coleraine for its continuing role as the town's library and main venue for public events.

COMPARISON:

244 Memorial Hall/Mechanics Institute, Glendinning St, Balmoral

213 Mechanics Institute, Hamilton-Port Fairy Rd, Byaduk

SSG 0543 Mechanics Institute, McNicol Street, Branxholme

ASSESSED BY: TFH & AN

ASSESSMENT DATE:

01-Jul-01

EXISTING LISTINGS:

HERITAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Include in VHR Include in RNE Include in Local Planning Scheme

No Recommendations for Inclusions

REFERENCES:

Author	Title	Year	Page
	Coleraine Albion	1962	
	Hamilton Spectator	1977	
	Mechanics' Institutes The Way Forward, Conference organised by the Kilmore Mechanics' Institute	1998	66
	Rediscovering Mechanics' Institutes, Australian Mechanics' Institute Conference 2000	2000	128

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: MECHANICS INSTITUTE

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: corner Winter and Pilleau Streets COLERAINE

STUDY NUMBER: 003

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

Back to Coleraine Committee	Back to Coleraine 1970	1970
Clancy, Frances	The Libraries of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria	2000
Connell, R. W & Irving, T. H	Class Structure in Australian History, Documents, Narrative and Argument	1980 var.
Departments of Lands and Survey	Township of Coleraine (Parishes of Coleraine and Konong Wootong County of Dundas)	1873
Departments of Lands and Survey	Township of Coleraine (Parishes of Coleraine and Konong Wootong County of Dundas)	1955
McGaffin, G	The Wannon Shire Centenary, 1872-1972: a brief history of the Shire of Wannon	1972 22-3
Nadel, George	Australia's Colonial Culture, Ideas, Men and Institutions in Mid-Nineteenth Century Eastern Australia.	1957 74 - 88, 111-152
Schrieber, Robert M	Proposed Mechanics Institute	1893
Stubblings, Leon George, in Gordon Forth, ed	Biographical Dictionary of the Western District of Victoria	1998 84
Trangmar, E. R.	The History of the Two Mechanics Halls in Coleraine	c.196 6 1
Troeth, Malcolm J	The Cultural Landscape of Coleraine	1988 121-3