

BRAILLE LIBRARY AND HALL



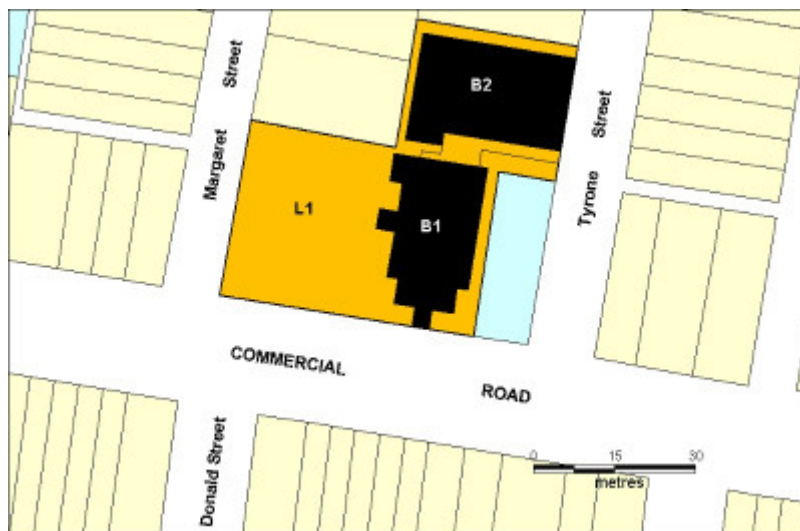
BRAILLE LIBRARY AND HALL SOHE 2008



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1 braille library 31-51 commercial rd sth yarra oct 2000 jbo front



braille library plan

Location

31-51 COMMERCIAL ROAD SOUTH YARRA, STONNINGTON CITY

Municipality

STONNINGTON CITY

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1926

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO25

VHR Registration

March 15, 2001

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 5, 2023

What is significant?

The Braille Library and the Braille Hall were designed by the Melbourne firm of commercial architects A & K Henderson. The library was constructed in 1918-19 and the hall in 1926-27. The library was designed with its special clientele in mind, having hand rails around the walls, few steps and rush matting on the floor to assist in navigation around the building. The building displays little embellishment or elaboration being constructed and finished in a relatively plain, free classical style in red brick. The building's main architectural feature is a dome-shaped octagonal space lit by inset windows and cupola roof lantern. There is office space at the front of the building and formerly a stage at the rear (since removed) framed by pilasters which are still in place. In 1927 the one storey Braille Hall was constructed in brick, in a manner sympathetic to the library. The hall was used for musical and theatrical performances with a stage, kitchen and dressing rooms at the western end. Full height folding doors allowed the hall to be divided into smaller spaces. Unusually, the stage boasts a central memorial fireplace flanked by stained glass windows (the stained glass has recently been removed). By 1939, further land had been purchased to the West of the site on which the Millicent Ritchie Memorial Garden was established. In the 1960s an infill connection was built between the library and hall. The place is remarkably intact and, apart from a collapsed cornice on the north exterior wall of the hall, in reasonably good condition.

The Braille Library was commissioned by the Victorian Association of Braille Writers which had been formed in 1894 principally by Tilly Aston, who had herself abandoned her tertiary studies due to the lack of Braille books, and by May Harrison the Association's honorary secretary for 18 years. In 1917 the Association purchased the land mainly with funds from the Edward Wilson Trust. The library was ready for use by April 1919 when the Argus reported its clientele consisted of the 1200 "blind citizens of the State as well as 20 returned soldiers who had lost their sight during the War". By 1972 the Association had extended its services to include talking books and changed its name to the Braille and Talking Book Library, adding recording studios to the site. In 1990 the library merged with the Association for the Blind and the site was acquired by the State Government. Vision Australia (the successor to the Blind Association) remained on the site to January 2001.

How is it significant?

The Braille Library and Hall is of historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Braille Library and Hall is of historical significance for its long, 80 year, association with the provision of services to the blind and visually handicapped, and the production of Braille and later talking books on site. It is historically important for its associations with one of the largest collections of Braille books in the world. The place

is also historically significant for its links to the Victorian Association of Braille Writers, an association of volunteers who transcribed books into Braille and made them available to the visually impaired free of charge.

The Braille Library and Hall and its associated garden are of aesthetic and historical importance for their landscape and streetscape contribution to Commercial Road. The garden, with its unusual hedge of *Duranta erecta* (Pigeon Berry) and its mature exotic trees, is important as a memorial to Millicent Ritchie, honorary secretary of the Association for over 20 years, and for its long associations with the library.

The Braille Library and the Braille Hall are of architectural significance as designs of the noted architectural firm of A & K Henderson. The library building, with its domed interior space reminiscent of the much larger domed reading room of the Public Library, is an interesting, purpose designed building which is highly intact.

Permit Exemptions

General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must [notify](#) the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

Specific Exemptions:

General Conditions

1. All alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.
2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of alterations that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such alteration shall cease and the Executive Director shall be notified as soon as possible.
3. If there is a conservation policy and plan approved by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it.
4. Nothing in this declaration prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.
5. Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authority where applicable.

New Building Works

No permit is required for construction of works shown on Drawing Nos. TP-01, TP-07, A1-01 to A1-04 incl., A2-01

? A2-03 incl., A3-02 and A4-07 to A4-13 incl prepared by Williams Ross Architects, provided that:

- * The south elevations of the Braille Library extensions are symmetrical and the proposed small wing walls are deleted.
- * Pier and beam footings are used for the west wall of the west extension to the Braille Library.
- * All existing folding timber panels in the Braille Hall remain in their recesses (ie. folding panels should not be used to clad the new wall between the proposed Training Room and Group Room 1).
- * Existing wall panelling in the proposed Recreation Room is not be extended over new walls.
- * Recessed light fittings are not used in existing ceilings.
- * The internal and external finishes and colour scheme are to the satisfaction of the Executive Director.
- * The wrought iron external sign is reinstated.
- * The small Millicent Ritchie memorial seat is relocated within the remaining garden proper.
- * The woven wire fencing to Commercial Road is reinstated.
- * The paling fencing to Margaret Street is retained.
- * The gates to Tyrone Street are a simplified version of the original and not a replica.
- * The construction details of the gravel carpark and protection and management of all trees and vegetation is to the satisfaction of the Executive Director.

General exemptions:

- * Subsequent interior painting to walls and ceilings, provided the preparation work for painting does not remove evidence of the building's earlier paint or other decorative scheme.
- * Replacement of carpets / flexible floor coverings eg vinyl.
- * Installation and replacement of curtain tracks, rod, blinds and other window dressings.
- * Refurbishment of bathrooms, toilets, and kitchen areas including removal of existing sanitary fixtures and associated piping, fixtures, appliances, benches, mirrors, and wall and floor coverings, and installation of new fixtures, and wall and floor coverings.
- * Electrical re-wiring provided that all new wiring is fully concealed and any original light switches or GPOs are retained in-situ.
- * Installation of hooks, nails and other devices for the hanging of paintings, mirrors, and other wall-mounted works of art.
- * Installation of bulk insulation to roof spaces.
- * Installation of smoke detectors.
- * Removal of extraneous external items such as air-conditioners, pipework, wiring, antennae, and making good.
- * Alteration or replacement of signage provided that any new sign is no larger than the existing, is located in the same position and that no internally illuminated signage is used.

Landscape

No permits are required for landscape and garden works which are in accordance with the recommendations contained in the Arboricultural Assessment prepared in September 2000 by Peter Clark of Treescape Professional Tree Services, or the report prepared by John Hawker dated 29 November 2000.

Construction dates	1918,
Architect/Designer	Henderson, A & K,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place, Registered object integral to a registered place,
Hermes Number	11457
Property Number	

History

Associated People: Tilly Aston

Assessment Against Criteria

Criterion A

The historical importance, association with or relationship to Victoria's history of the place or object.

The Braille Library and Hall is important to the History of the provision of services to the Blind and Visually impaired during the 20th Century.

Criterion B

The importance of a place or object in demonstrating rarity or uniqueness.

The Braille Library and Hall is important as the site of the largest repository for material in Braille

Criterion C

The place or object's potential to educate, illustrate or provide further scientific investigation in relation to Victoria's cultural heritage.

Criterion D

The importance of a place or object in exhibiting the principal characteristics or the representative nature of a place or object as part of a class or type of places or objects.

The Braille Library and Hall is the only purpose built building designed as a library for the blind.

Criterion E

The importance of the place or object in exhibiting good design or aesthetic characteristics and/or in exhibiting a richness, diversity or unusual integration of features.

The Library, Hall and Garden provide a pleasant integration of design elements. The Library 's octagonal shape especially on this small scale is extremely rare.

Criterion F

The importance of the place or object in demonstrating or being associated with scientific or technical innovations or achievements.

Criterion G

The importance of the place or object in demonstrating social or cultural associations.

The Braille Library and Hall is important to the History of the production of Braille and Talking Books. The Library and Hall is also important as the major repository for Braille Books in Australia.

Criterion H

Any other matter which the Council considers relevant to the determination of cultural heritage significance

Extent of Registration

1. All the buildings known as the Braille Library and Hall marked B1 and B2 on Diagram 1926 held by the Executive Director.

2. All the land marked L1 on Diagram Number 1926 held by the Executive Director

3. All the following objects :

* Wrought iron "Braille and Talking Book Library" sign.

* Memorial Plaque over Fire place in Braille Hall.

* Stained glass windows from Braille Hall depicting Dickens, Shakespeare, Scott and Milton

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>