

# PRAHRAN MECHANICS INSTITUTE



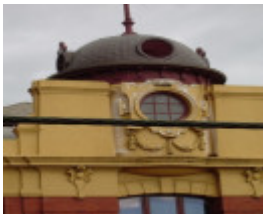
PRAHRAN MECHANICS INSTITUTE SOHE 2008



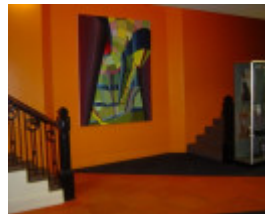
PRAHRAN MECHANICS INSTITUTE SOHE 2008



h00400 1 facade full



h00400 central dome



h00400 pmi hex stair



h00400 streetscape2



h00400 top floor



h00400 top floor window



h00400 h prahran mechanics map

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## Location

140 HIGH STREET PRAHRAN, STONNINGTON CITY

## Municipality

STONNINGTON CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0400

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO053

## VHR Registration

December 9, 2004

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 14, 2004

### What is significant?

The Prahran Mechanics Institute was established in 1854 when Prahran was a small hamlet surrounded by swampland. Mechanics Institutes were popular in their various communities as places where mainly working class men could go to improve themselves by listening to lectures related to practical work and enabling them access to books. These Institutes were the forerunners of adult education and the public library system in Victoria.

A building was completed to accommodate the Institute and its library in Chapel Street, Prahran in 1856. The Institute began providing formal classes in French and stenography from the 1860s.

In 1870, the Institute started a School of Art offering classes in art and design. The following year, the Prahran Institute of Art was registered with the Education Department.

Beset by poor management and financial problems, the Institute went into decline in the late 1870's. Measures were taken by concerned citizens who persuaded the Government of Victoria to pass an act that provided for the Incorporation and Government of the Prahran Mechanics Institute. On October 27th 1899, the Victoria Government passed Act No, 1617 (The Prahran Mechanics Institute Act, 1899) which ensured the continuation of the Institute.

By 1908, the Institute's new secretary, J.H. Furneaux had introduced cookery and industrial art classes and in

1909, the Institute registered its school with the Education Department as the Prahran Technical Art School.

By 1910, the Institute could no longer accommodate the numbers of students enrolling for classes and the committee planned to sell the Chapel Street building in order to accommodate its expansion. An amendment to the Act allowed the Chapel Street building to be mortgaged and leased. Money raised from the sale enabled land to be purchased at High Street, Prahran where two buildings were constructed in 1915 to accommodate the Institute's expansion.

The architect for the new Institute building was Ernest Horatio Willis. Willis was Member of Prahran Council: 1908- 1920 and Mayor of Prahran Council: 1913-14 & 1918-19 and was architect for Fawkner Mansions in South Yarra, Waingawa Mansion in Armadale and houses in Victory Square, Armadale.

Willis designed a red brick building in the Federation style with an eclectic combination of Classical and Romanesque architectural motifs. The roofline consisted of terminating vertical pilasters and three copper domed turrets that featured circular vents and flag poles. The front area of the building had a main arched entrance into the Institute and either side of the entrance were a series of shops, each with its own High Street entrance. The leasing of shops enabled financial income for the Institute.

The building that extended to St Johns Street at the rear of the Prahran Mechanics Institute was known as Prahran Technical School and operated from 1915 to 1970 when it became part of Prahran College of Advanced Education (now Swinburne University of Technology).

In 1915 the Institute leased the site of the Prahran Mechanics Institute to the Department of Education for a peppercorn rent of 1 shilling per year in return for funding and equipment. This agreement was valid for 33 years. In 1947, the Institute entered a new lease with the Minister of Education giving the Department use of the High Street buildings for 99 years, again at a shilling per year payable on demand until the year 2046.

The Prahran Mechanics Institute library has remained in the building, firstly at the rear and in 1974 relocated to the areas at the front of the building on High Street. The walls between the shops were removed to accommodate the Institute's library and some offices of the University. The High Street entrance to the library was the original main entrance to the building and led to the central hexagonal space with its symmetrical staircases. The hall leading into the hexagonal space was blocked off in the 1970s. Part of the Institute's building is occupied by Swinburne University of Technology.

### **How is it significant?**

Prahran Mechanics Institute is of historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria.

### **Why is it significant?**

Prahran Mechanics Institute is of historical significance as a rare surviving example of a Mechanics Institute built in a suburban environment. Other comparable Institutes are the Footscray Mechanics Institute c.1913 and Oakleigh Mechanics Institute c.1906.

Prahran Mechanics Institute is also historically significant as one of a small group of Mechanics Institutes still operating. As well as running a library service, it conducts educational and recreational activities in the Mechanics Institute tradition.

Prahran Mechanics Institute is historically significant for its long association with technical education in Victoria and with the Mechanics Institute movement.

Prahran Mechanics Institute is of architectural significance as a purpose built Mechanics Institute designed in the Federation Free style. The High Street facade is considerably intact and important elements include the main entrance and brick arched feature, window front details intact with copper frames and decorative geometric floor tiled entrances. A portion of the red brick facade is bordered by glazed ceramic tiles that form an ornamental effect.

## **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 exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object. General Conditions: 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works 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 works shall cease and the Executive Director shall be notified as soon as possible. Note: All archaeological places have the potential to contain significant sub-surface artefacts and other remains. In most cases it will be necessary to obtain approval from Heritage Victoria before the undertaking any works that have a significant sub-surface component. General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan approved by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: The existence of a Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan endorsed by Heritage Victoria provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan. General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this declaration prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions. General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable.

**Minor Works :** Note: Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works may submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted

## Exterior:

Removal of extraneous items such as air conditioners, pipe work, ducting, wiring, antennae, aerials etc, and making good.

Installation and repairing of damp proofing by either injection method or grout pocket method.

Minor repairs and maintenance should replace like with like.

**Interior:**

Painting of previously painted walls and ceilings provided that preparation or painting does not remove evidence of the original paint or other decorative scheme.

Removal of paint from originally unpainted or oiled joinery, doors, architraves, skirtings and decorative strapping.

Installation, removal or replacement of carpets and/or flexible floor coverings.

Installation, removal or replacement of curtain track, rods, blinds and other window dressings.

Installation, removal or replacement of honour boards, blackboards, white boards or pin-up boards

Refurbishment of bathrooms and toilets including removal, installation or replacement of sanitary fixtures and associated piping, mirrors, wall and floor coverings.

Installation, removal or replacement of ducted, hydronic or concealed radiant type heating provided that the installation does not damage existing skirtings and architraves and that the central plant is concealed.

Installation, removal or replacement of electrical wiring provided that all new wiring is fully concealed and any original light switches, pull cords, push buttons or power outlets are retained in-situ.

Removal or installation of compactus shelving if no structural work is required.

Demolition or removal of non-original stud/partition walls, suspended ceilings or non-original wall linings (including plasterboard, laminate and Masonite), lights, built in cupboards, cubicle partitions, computer and office fit-out and the like.

Removal or replacement of non original door and window furniture including, hinges, locks, knob sets and sash lifts.

Removal of tiling or concrete slabs in wet areas provided there is no damage to or alteration of original structure or fabric.

Installation, removal or replacement of electrical clocks, public address systems, detectors, alarms, emergency lights, exit signs, luminaries and the like on plaster surfaces.

Installation, removal or replacement of bulk insulation in the roof space.

Installation of plant from within the roof space

Installation of new fire hydrant services including sprinklers, fire doors and elements affixed to plaster surfaces.

Construction dates	1854,
Architect/Designer	Willis, Ernest,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Hermes Number	13519
Property Number	

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**Plaque Citation**

This Institute was established in Chapel Street in 1854 to provide education for working class men. This Federation Free Classical style building, designed by Ernest Horatio Willis, was built in 1915 to accommodate the Institute's expansion.

## Extent of Registration

### NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 1995**, I give notice under section 46 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including the Heritage Register Number 400 in the category described as a Heritage place :

Prahran Mechanics Institute, 140 High Street,  
Prahran, Stonnington City Council.

#### EXTENT:

1. All the building marked B1 on Diagram 400 held by the Executive Director.
2. All the land described in Certificate of Title Volume 3699, Folio 623 and marked L1 on Diagram 400 held by the Executive Director.

Dated 9 December 2004

RAY TONKIN  
Executive Director

[*Victoria Government Gazette* G 50 9 December 2004 p.3349]

*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/>*