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# Williamstown Mechanics' Institute Complex



Williamstown Mechanics'  
Institute Complex, Hobsons  
Bay Heritage Study 2006

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## Location

9-17 Electra Street WILLIAMSTOWN, Hobsons Bay City

## Municipality

HOBSONS BAY CITY

## Level of significance

Incl in HO area contributory

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO94

## Heritage Listing

Hobsons Bay City

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is Significant?

The Williamstown Mechanics' Institute complex, comprising the Mechanics' Institute Hall originally designed by John Flannagan and constructed in stages between 1860 and 1890 with later additions by different architects, the residence constructed in 1883 and the associated land, at 9-17 Electra Street, Williamstown.

How is it Significant?

The Williamstown Mechanics' Institute complex is of local historic, social and aesthetic significance to the City of Hobsons Bay.

#### Why is it Significant?

Historically, it is significant as an early Mechanics' Institute in the metropolitan context and is the one of the earliest surviving public buildings in Williamstown. It has been associated with prominent local personalities and for a long period a major Williamstown public building. (AHC criteria A4 and H1)

Socially, it is significant as one of the largest institutes in Victoria and demonstrates the importance of Mechanics' Institutes to the development of communities during the nineteenth century. It remains a valued community building and landmark today. (AHC criterion G1)

Aesthetically, it is significant as an intact example of a major nineteenth century public building that demonstrates its sequential construction by its asymmetry and is also notable for the detached caretaker's residence, which is possibly unique in Victoria. Related in scale and style to the nearby Masonic Temple, it makes an important contribution to the historic character of Electra Street and the group of public buildings of which it forms a part. (AHC criteria E1 and F1)

Heritage Study/Consultant	Hobsons Bay - Hobsons Bay Heritage Study, Hobsons Bay City Council, 2006;
Architect/Designer	Flannagan, John, Polain, CJ, Egan, Michael,
Hermes Number	15023
Property Number	

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## Physical Description 1

The Williamstown Mechanics' Institute and Free Library has a stuccoed rubble basalt, parapeted facade of three bays: the central bay of two storeys and the flanking bays, of one storey. The central and northern bays possessing a trabeated composition, placed over arched fenestration, in the manner of the Italian Renaissance. A typically pierced and balustraded parapet, with a central entablature to the main bay is flanked by a simpler panelled parapet on the northern wing and just a cornice on the south: the symmetry of the central bay not being followed by its secondary wings. Coupled Tuscan and Ionic order columns divide this main bay into a further three elements: the central one framing the key-stoned arched entrance. Impost moulds connect the arcuation which prevails beneath this trabeated layer. A similar arched entrance is located in the northern bay but three arched windows only exist in the south. The hall wing was parallel to Electra Street, at the rear.

Finialled orbs and urns are gone from the parapets; a fire escape has been added above the south wing and the formerly arched window there converted to a door; sundry additions have been made at the rear and the former picket fence enclosing the yard at Electra Street has been replaced with a high fence. The Williamstown Historical Society advise that the Foundation Stone has not been located during recent (2002) restoration works.

The residence is a Victorian timber villa.

## Integrity

External Integrity and condition

*Integrity* - Moderate. *Condition* - Fair to Good

## Physical Description 2

## Context

The Mechanics' Institute complex is one of a number of nineteenth century public buildings in Electra Street, which includes the adjacent Masonic Hall, as well as the former Wesleyan Church complex diagonally opposite.

## Historical Australian Themes

Developing cultural institutions and ways of life, Forming associations

## Physical Description 3

### *Associations*

John Pascoe Fawkner, David Syme, James Taylor Morrell, Michael Egan, CJ Polain

*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/>*