
MECHANICS INSTITUTE HALL (FORMER)



23300 Mechanics Institute
Branxholme 0469

Location

McNicol Street BRANXHOLME, Southern Grampians Shire

Municipality

SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE

Level of significance

Stage 2 study complete

Heritage Listing

Southern Grampians Shire

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 25, 2002

What is significant?

The former Mechanics Institute in McNicol Street, Branxholme is a large timber building incorporating the main hall, stage and lobby, a reading and a meeting room, the supper room and kitchen, and a recent extension used for community support groups. The hall is located in the centre of the town. The local Mutual Improvement Association purchased the land in 1878. Construction commenced late in 1883 and the hall was opened with a concert and ball in January 1884. Leading townsfolk were associated with the project from the beginning and continued to serve as members of the committee. Rooms with access from the rear, used as library reading rooms and for holding meetings, were added behind the stage in 1888. The supper room and kitchen were added in 1936. The property was transferred to the Crown in 1959 which allowed for further improvements under a grant. No architect has been associated with the original design but the builder was George Foster. The 1888 extensions were built by J Coutts, and Ewan Coutts E Gibbons built the 1936 extension which was designed by the Hamilton architect, H I McGuigan. Subsequently, the complex has been modified unsympathetically by the

replacement of windows, the cladding of the walls and certain internal changes. It now has a low degree of integrity but is in good condition. There are many timber memorial plaques inside the main hall and supper room. Two standard cast iron street lights survive outside.

How is it significant?

The former Mechanics Institute Hall is of historical, cultural and social significance to the township of Branhholme and Southern Grampians Shire.

Why is it significant?

The former Mechanics Institute is of historical significance to Branhholme because, in the 19th and early 20th centuries it reflected the town's status and aspirations.

It is of cultural significance for its association with the self-improvement of all citizens through reading, lectures and concerts, and for the shared community values which are the basis of a community.

Socially, the hall is significant because it provides a focus for community activities and entertainment such as dances and film nights, importantly, across traditional class and other divisions. These roles continue and the hall is now used for infant welfare and other community support groups, and as the bowling club's rooms.

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| Heritage Study/Consultant | Southern Grampians - Southern Grampians Shire Heritage Study, Timothy Hubbard P/L, Annabel Neylon, 2002; |
| Construction dates | 1883, |
| Heritage Act Categories | Registered place, |
| Other Names | BRANXHOLME PUBLIC HALL, |
| Hermes Number | 23300 |
| Property Number | |

Physical Conditions

The building is maintained in good condition.

Physical Description 1

The former Mechanics Institute is a large timber hall with many extensions, additions and alterations. The main hall has a stage at the southern end with two small rooms behind. These rooms are lined with pine boards and are largely in original condition. The floor of the hall has been replaced recently. The porch, possibly not added until the early 1900s, was enlarged in 1959 and has since been much altered. The supper room and kitchen, added in 1936, survive largely in original condition but with modern facilities. A new wing was added at the front of the building to accommodate visiting community services. The whole of the exterior of the complex has been clad but the weatherboards presumably survive beneath the cladding. Most of the original timber windows have been replaced with aluminium windows. One original polychromatic chimney survives.

There are many honour boards and memorial plaques surviving throughout the building, especially in the supper room.

Two cast iron street lights of standard design survive on the footpath outside the hall.

Historical Australian Themes

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

8.5.3 Associating for mutual aid

8.5.4 Pursuing common leisure interests

8.14 Living in the country and rural settlements

Usage/Former Usage

Public hall

Integrity

Very low integrity externally but fair degree of integrity internally

Physical Description 2

William Howarth, W R Skene, William Gough Jnr, Henry Edkins and T W Smith, first trustees

William Howarth, first president of committee

Rev W C Wallace, first vice-president of committee

Edward Gough, first secretary of committee

Kenneth Snodgrass, first treasurer

George Foster, builder of original hall

J Coutts, builder of 1888 extension

Ewan Coutts and E Gibbons, builders of 1936 extension

H I McGuigan, architect of 1936 extension

Mr. Dobie, (Mrs.) G Millar, H Edwards, A A Bourke, and (Mrs.) D Roberts, caretakers

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/>