

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: EUCALYPTUS DISCOVERY CENTRE

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: 69-71 Whyte Street COLERAINE

STUDY NUMBER: 072

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

OTHER NAME/S OF PLACE: WANNON SHIRE OFFICES (SECOND)

PRECINCT: Coleraine

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

ALLOTMENT: 6&7 **SECTION:** 8 **PARISH:** PARISH OF COLERAINE

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

Located on the south side of Whyte Street, in the central business district of Coleraine.

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: Local



Eucalyptus Discovery Centre, Whyte Street, Coleraine.

Image Date: 09/08/01

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All the buildings and all of the land associated with section 8, allotments 6 & 7.

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: EUCALYPTUS DISCOVERY CENTRE

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: 69-71 Whyte Street COLERAINE

STUDY NUMBER: 072

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The former Masonic Lodge is located on a narrow block of land at 37 Winter Street Coleraine. It is a brick building with a corrugated iron roof, consisting of a vestibule, main hall, supper room, kitchen and toilet/service area. Six iron roof vents capped in an unusual design run along the ridge of the main hall.

The facade, entrance area and south wall of the main hall are cement rendered, while the rest of the exterior walls are panelled red-brick. The 1960s toilet block is made of cement blocks. The Masonic symbol is moulded in render on the facade, facing Winter Street, although other signs have clearly been removed in recent years since the building was decommissioned. The traditionally severe neo-Classicism of the exterior reflects the values of the Masons.

As usual, the interiors of the building also reflect the values and formal ceremonies of the Masons, as well as the less formal social function of the building. Inside, the main hall measures approximately 9 metres by 15 metres. It has pressed metal ceilings of a very fine quality, with ornate pressed metal ceiling vents. An Art Nouveau era ceiling fan is positioned in the middle of the roof above the ceremonial area. Two pendant ceiling lights with milk glass shades are the main source of lighting. There is a blue fleur-de-lis patterned carpet on the floor, except in the ceremonial area, which is a rectangular section of the floor covered with an oil cloth painted with black and white geometrical designs. There are high, small timber-framed windows glazed in opaque glass on the south side only. A timber door in the south wall gives onto the side walkway.

The main entrance to the Lodge is at the end of a walkway on the south side. Inside the main door is a timber panelled cloak room space, still with original coat hooks. The red fleur-de-lis carpet on the floor is worn and looks to be at least 50 years old. An extensive set of storage cupboards in the vestibule have been removed in recent years. A timber notice board remains on the north wall. The entrance to the main hall from the vestibule is marked by an exceptionally wide nine panelled timber door. Two electric lights, with intact red and blue globes, are positioned high on the wall beside the door to indicate if access is permissible.

The supper room is a later extension, built c. 1936. It extends the full width of the block, approximately 12 metres by 10 metres. It contains one double hung sash window, a corner fireplace, and moulded plaster cornices and ceiling in Art Deco designs. At the end of the supper room is a kitchen and a later cement block toilet and service area, which includes a door to deliver firewood to the supper room.

HISTORY:

The land on which the Eucalyptus Discovery Centre now stands was originally purchased from the Crown by Robert Bourne on 28th November 1854 (Departments of Lands and Survey, 1955). The land, being allotments 6 and 7 of Section 8, fronted the main Adelaide Road (Whyte Street) and covered just over 1.2 acres (one quarter of a hectare). There is little information known about Robert Bourne. It is presumed that he was either an absentee owner, or that he sold the land soon after its purchase.

Indar Sondhu, a local businessman purchased Allotments 6 & 7 at some time prior to 1946, although the exact date of purchase and the vendor are unknown. He may have intended the new 'Town Hall' to have been a memorial to those who had served and died in both World Wars. Sondhu arrived in the district around the turn of the century and worked throughout the area as a hawker. He purchased 'Mullagh', at Harrow, the original homestead of early pastoralist David Edgar (Edgar, 34).

Sondhu gifted the land to the Shire of Wannon in 1946 for the purposes of building a Town Hall and Offices

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: EUCALYPTUS DISCOVERY CENTRE

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: 69-71 Whyte Street COLERAINE

STUDY NUMBER: 072

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

(McGaffin, 21). The Shire of Wannon had been created in 1872, and initially conducted its meetings at the Coleraine Courthouse. The former Council Chambers on the north side of the main road, at 54 Whyte Street had been in use since they were officially opened in 1874, but there were many who felt they were no longer adequate for the needs of the Shire, and that they were structurally unsound (ibid.).

By July 1957, there was a strong push to build a new Shire Offices and Town Hall. There was much debate in local papers regarding the suggestion to build new offices, or renovate and remodel the existing offices. Discussion continued and, in May 1959, Mr. S. G. Richards, an architect from Ballarat presented plans detailing the renovation of the existing Shire Offices, at an estimated cost of 10 000 pounds (ibid.). There were protests from a wide variety of groups that the offices were not suitable for renovation, that the foundations were too weak to support a second story, and that the locally made bricks (with which the building was constructed) were prone to rising damp (ibid.). The Citizens Town Hall Committee was set up to promote the development of new, modern facilities, which would project the image of a progressive, forward-thinking municipality. Any ideas of renovating the old offices were abandoned in the face of strong public opposition.

In December 1959, Mr. A.C. Leith of Leith and Bartlett, drew up plans for new municipal offices to be built on the "Town Hall" site in Whyte Street. Leith had designed the former Shire of Glenelg Council Chambers in Casterton which were opened in 1937. The new building was to be constructed of the most modern materials, and to have the latest design features incorporated. Suggested materials were either cream brick or Mount Gambier stone, with floor heating, steel roofing and acoustic control (ibid.). The proposed design included a Municipal library, meeting room and shire offices on the ground floor. The second storey housing the engineers offices, drafting rooms, toilet facilities, kitchenette, President's room and Council Chambers. A 5 000 gallon water tank was to be installed below the building (ibid.). W. J. Henry and Son Pty Ltd won the tender to construct the new offices, which were completed in December 1961 at a cost of 25,000 pounds. Councillor Gaussen laid the Foundation Stone on October 10th as a memorial to commemorate the fallen of the Australian, Imperial and Indian forces of World Wars 1 and 2. The building was officially opened by the Minister for Local Government, the Honorable Murray Porter, and a Memorial Plaque in the foyer honoring fallen servicemen was unveiled by Indar Sondhu (ibid.).

Following the council amalgamations of the Kennett government, the Shire of Wannon was absorbed into the Shire of Southern Grampians. The former Wannon Shire offices were converted into the Eucalyptus Discovery Centre in the 1990s. The Eucalyptus Discovery Centre is a interpretation and resource centre for the Peter Francis Points Arboretum Inc., which is considered to be the official National Eucalyptus Collection of Australia.

THEMATIC CONTEXT:

Theme 1: Tracing the Evolution of the Australian Environment

- 1.2 Tracing the emergency of Australian Plants
- 1.3 Assessing scientifically diverse environments

Theme 6: Educating

- 6.1 Forming associations, libraries and institutions for self education

Theme 7: Governing

- 7.6 Administering Australia
 - 7.6.1 Developing local government authorities

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: EUCALYPTUS DISCOVERY CENTRE

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: 69-71 Whyte Street COLERAINE

STUDY NUMBER: 072

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

Theme 8: Developing Australia's Cultural Life

8.8 Remembering the fallen

CONDITION:

The Eucalyptus Discovery Centre is in very good condition, and appears to be regularly maintained as a local museum/exhibition place and visitor information centre.

INTEGRITY:

High degree of intactness

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

What is significant?

The Eucalyptus Discovery Centre, formerly the Wannon Shire Offices is located at 69-71 Whyte Street in the centre of the township of Coleraine. The land had been donated to the Shire in 1946 by Indar Sondhu, an Indian Hawker who was so successful as a merchant that he could purchase a substantial squatting homestead near Harrow. He may have intended the new 'Town Hall' to have been a memorial to those who had served and died in both World Wars. The Council Chambers, a modest two-storey cream brick building in a conservative Moderne style were built in 1961. The foundation stone, laid by Cr. Gaussen of Gringegalgona, commemorated the fallen of the Australian, Imperial and Indian forces in WW1 and WW2. When the building was opened by the Minister for Local Government, Indar Sondhu unveiled a plaque to commemorate fallen servicemen. The building superseded the 1874 Council Chambers on the opposite side of Whyte Street. The architect was A. C. Leith of Leith and Bartlett who had designed the much larger 1937 former Shire of Glenelg Council Chambers in Casterton. The Council Chamber, President's Room, Engineer's office and a kitchenette were located upstairs with the municipal library and other offices located downstairs. The building became redundant following the Kennett Government's program of municipal amalgamation. The ground floor now houses an interpretative display for the Peter Francis Points Arboretum. Other modifications were made and services improved. The upper floor continues to be used for community purposes. The building retains a very high degree of integrity, including much of the original furniture and furnishings and is in very good condition. It is surrounded by landscaped grounds, primarily planted out with native trees, shrubs and grasses.

Why is it Significant?

The former Wannon Shire Offices are of architectural, historical and social significance to the township of Coleraine.

Why is it Significant?

The former Wannon Shire Offices are of architectural significance as the work of the leading Victorian municipal architect, A. C. Leith and as a good example of civic buildings in the Mid-Twentieth Century Moderne style. They are an important comparison with the earlier Shire of Glenelg Council Chambers, also designed by Leith. Historically the offices are significant for representing the last phase of the Shire of Wannon, for their association with Indar Sondhu, a successful Indian hawker, and as a memorial to the fallen in both World Wars. Socially, the place continues as an important site of community activity and as an educational facility for the township of Coleraine and the Southern Grampians Shire generally.

COMPARISON:

283 Penshurst Memorial Hall, Martin Street, Penshurst

423 Mechanic's Institute RSL Hall at Dunkeld, cnr Stirling & Martin Street, Dunkeld

ASSESSED BY: MGT

ASSESSMENT DATE:

16/06/2003

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: EUCALYPTUS DISCOVERY CENTRE

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: 69-71 Whyte Street COLERAINE

STUDY NUMBER: 072

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

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
Centenary Celebrations Committee	Coleraine Centenary Celebrations, October 7 to 14 1939	1939	
Department of Lands and Survey	Township of Coleraine (Parishes of Coleraine and Konong Wootong County of Dundas)	1873	
Department of Lands and Survey, Melbourne	Township of Coleraine (Parishes of Coleraine and Konong Wootong County of Dundas)	1955	
G. McGaffin	The Wannon Shire Centenary 1872-1972 : A brief History of the Shire of Wannon	1972	21
Nancy Edgar	Burnt Eucalyptus Bark : Early Settlers of the Far Western District of Victoria	n.d	23