

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: PENSURST MEMORIAL HALL

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Martin Street PENSURST

STUDY NUMBER: 283

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

OTHER NAME/S OF PLACE: PENSURST MECHANICS INSTITUTE

PRECINCT: Penshurst

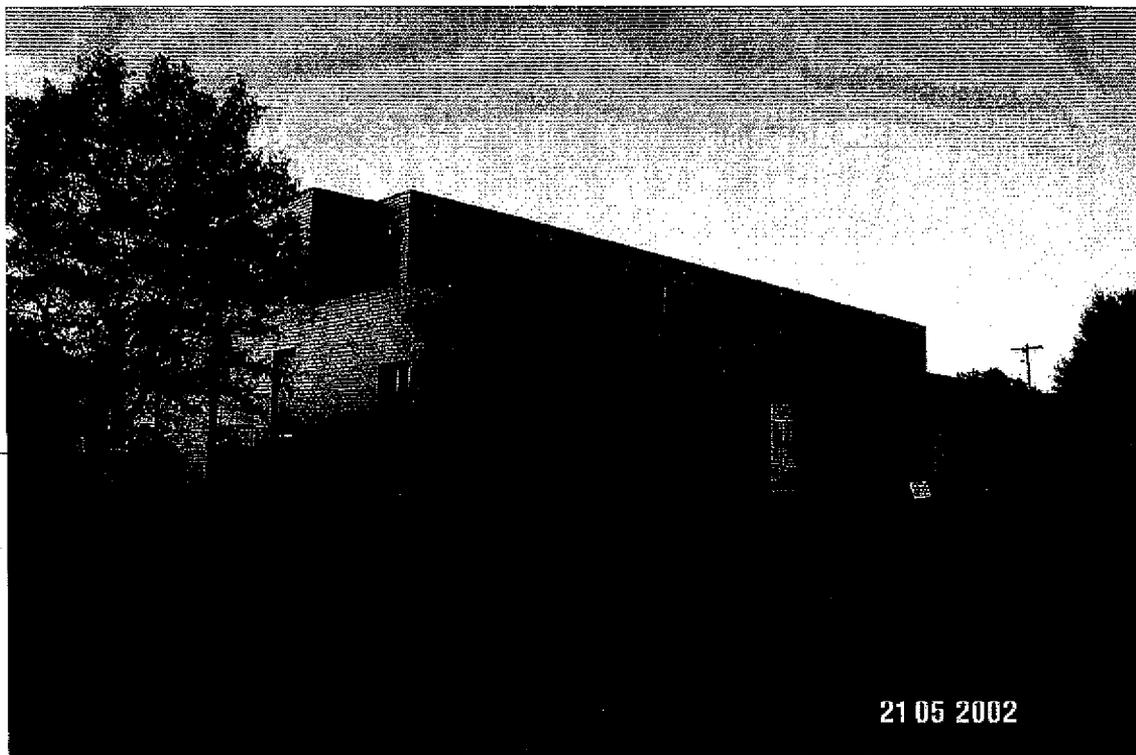
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

ALLOTMENT: 1 **SECTION:** 13 **PARISH:** PARISH OF YALIMBA

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

CFA 475 J6; Vic Roads 233 O11; located on the west side of Martin Street on the north-west corner of Watton Street in the centre of the township.

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: Local



Penshurst Memorial Hall, Martin St, Penshurst

Image Date: 15/05/2002

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All the building excluding the interiors, and all of the land, being the Mechanic's Institute reserve located on allotment 1 of section 13 of the township of Penshurst.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The Penshurst Memorial Hall is a large cream brick building constructed in 1963 which incorporates sections of the original 19th century bluestone building. Facilities include the main hall, stage and backstage area, the foyer and associated services, and the supper room and kitchen. The large aluminium and plate glass front doors are typical of the period. The large steel framed windows are distinctive for their use of 'one-way' blue glass. The facade includes the name of the building in red, sans-serif lettering derived from the typeface developed for the London Underground. The use of primary colours, specifically red, blue and yellow (as cream bricks) can be linked to the avant garde Moderne architecture of the de Stijl group and the architect, W M Dudok who were active in Holland before the Second World War. They strongly influenced the Melbourne architects, Seabrook and Fildes who were very active the Hamilton district before 1939. The building has been further altered and modernised since 1963 but always in sympathy with the Moderne design. It retains a high degree of integrity to its 1963 appearance.

HISTORY:

Land was permanently reserved in 1870 for the purpose of a Mechanic's Institute. The land was adjacent to the newly erected Shire of Mount Rouse Council Chambers. It is not known exactly when the first part of the building was constructed. The Trustees of the Mechanics Institute are not rated in 1870 but they are rated in 1871 for improvements with a nett annual valuation of 40 pounds. (SMR RB 1871 #460). This suggests some early, possibly timber building. The main building was a plain bluestone hall with high level 'Diocletian' windows and a low pitched roof. No architect or builder has yet been associated with the design. One candidate for the early building is John S. Jenkins (c.1835-1913), architect and engineer. Jenkins was appointed engineer of the roads board in December 1860, and served in that capacity until 1863, when the transition was made to the Shire of Mount Rouse. He served as both Shire Secretary and engineer from 1870 to 1876. Jenkins may have designed the earliest buildings. He married Emma Wright in 1861 and died at Richmond in (VPI, Reg. No. 3595 & 3413) More likely as the designer of what is now the carcass of the present hall is the local architect, John Montgomery who called tenders for a "bluestone hall in connection with the Penshurst Mechanics Institute" in June 1884 (Tonkin, 1971). These may have been the additions in the plans and specification tabled at the Shire Council meeting in July 1884 (Shire of Mount Rouse, 1964). Montgomery called for new tenders in the following August. Timber extensions for supper rooms, service areas and offices were added to the front and sides. A description of Penshurst in 1903 stated that the Mechanics Institute "contains the hall in which the various entertainments of the township take place, capable of seating some 400 persons, with good stage and scenery" (Smith, 535).

The Mechanics Institute movement had emerged in Scotland at the end of the eighteenth century. It quickly spread to London and the developing industrial cities of England in the first half of the nineteenth century. The movement succeeded best in Australia and that success was especially strong in colonial Victoria. This was due to a combination of social, economic and political factors, although the discussion of politics and religion was usually banned by an institute's regulations. Over a thousand institutes, some with associated free libraries and lecture halls, were built in the city and country. The first to be built was the Melbourne Athenaeum in 1848. The majority of examples were built in the 1860s and 1870s, and the last examples in the more remote parts of Victoria were built up to the outbreak of World War One and possibly later. Although dominated by the middle class, the movement could cross class and religious divisions, often uniting a town in its aspiration so that the construction of a mechanics institute represented not just a practical civic achievement but a real expression of shared cultural values.

Many significant members of the community have served as trustees over the years. Frank Liles Olle, for example was president of the committee in 1888 while the vice-president was the incumbent Presbyterian minister, Rev. Archibald J. Simpson (Sutherland, Vol. 2, 66).

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The building underwent a major renovation and extension in 1963 when the Governor, Lord De Lisle, laid the foundation stone. Much of the carcass of the original bluestone building was retained while the timber extensions were demolished. Outer walls of cream brick were added on the lines of the earlier timber extensions. This work appears to have been undertaken as a memorial to those who had served in the Second World War. The building remains in use for a wide range of community activities.

THEMATIC CONTEXT:

Theme 3: Developing local, regional and national economies

3.21 Entertaining for profit

Theme 6: Educating

6.1 Forming associations, libraries, and institutes for self-education

Theme 8: Developing Australia's cultural life

8.5 Forming associations

8.5.3 Associating for mutual aid

8.5.4 Pursuing common leisure interests

8.8 Remembering the fallen

8.14 Living in the country and rural settlements

CONDITION:

The whole building complex is in excellent condition.

INTEGRITY:

High degree of integrity to the 1963 condition. Only sections of the original stone building survive.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

What is significant?

The Penshurst Memorial Hall located in Martin Street in the centre of the township began as the local Mechanic's Institute in 1871. No architect or builder has yet been positively linked with the design although John S. Jenkins, Shire Secretary and Engineer is one possibility and the local architect, John Montgomery, who called tenders for a bluestone hall, is another. Mechanics Institutes were an important reflection of the prosperity, culture and aspirations of a town. They were also important as social centres. The original building was bluestone, typically Classical in style and rather austere in its architecture. Over the years several weatherboards additions were made which have since been demolished. Finally, in 1963 it was completely remodelled as a Memorial Hall, incorporating much of the original building's carcass within a new cream brick building. The designer was a junior engineer on the staff of the Shire. The foundation stone of the new building was laid by Viscount de Lisle on 26th October 1963, in his capacity as Lord of the Manor of Penshurst as much as Governor General of Australia. The building remains substantially intact to its 1963 design and in excellent condition.

How is it significant?

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

Why is it significant?

The Penshurst Memorial Hall is of historical significance as the principal public meeting place of the township for over 130 years. Culturally, the hall is significant to Penshurst because, in the 19th and early 20th centuries it reflected the town's status and was associated with the self-improvement of its citizens

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through reading, lectures and concerts. Socially, the hall provided a focus for community activities such as dances and film nights. These roles continue and the hall is still used for a range of activities.

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COMPARISON:

134 Coleraine Mechanics Institute, Cnr Winter & Pilleau Streets, Coleraine
213 Mechanics Institute and Free Library, Hamilton-Port Fairy Road, Byaduk
244 Memorial Hall/ Mechanics Institute, Glendinning Street, Balmoral
378 RSL Hall (former Mechanics Institute), NE Cnr Stirling & Wills Street, Dunkeld

ASSESSED BY: tfh

ASSESSMENT DATE: 14/05/2002

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
	Mechanics' Institutes The Way Forward, Conference organised by the Kilmore Mechanics' Institute	1998	66
	Rediscovering Mechanics' Institutes, Australian Mechanics'Institute Conference 2000	2000	128
Alexander Sutherland	Victoria and Its Metropolis Volume II	1888	535
Frances Clancy	The Libraries of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria	2000	
George Nadel	Australia's Colonial Culture, Ideas, Men and Institutions in Mid-Nineteenth Century Eastern Australia.	1957	74 - 88, 111-152
James Smith, ed.	Cyclopaedia of Victoria Vol. 2	1903	535
Macbeth Genealogical Services	Pioneer Index Victoria 1836 - 1888 (reg. No. 1505)	1998	
Mount Rouse Shire Council	Shire of Mount Rouse, In the Centre of the Fertile Western District of Victoria: Centenary Celebrated	1966	
R. W. Connell & T. H Irving	Class Structure in Australian History, Documents, Narrative and Argument	1980	1var.
Ray Tonkin, comp.	Warrnambool Examiner, Tender and Other Notices	1973	