

# HERITAGE PLACE

**NAME OF PLACE:** MECHANICS INSTITUTE AND MEMORIAL HALL

**ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE:** Glendinning Street BALMORAL

**STUDY NUMBER:** 163

**HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:**

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**PRECINCT:** Balmoral

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:** Southern Grampians Shire

**ALLOTMENT:** 7,8 &9 **SECTION:** 6

**ACCESS DESCRIPTION:**

CFA 388J 9; VicRoads 227 T3; located on the south side of Glendinning Street in the centre of the township of Balmoral.

**SIGNIFICANCE RATING:** Local



Mechanics Institute, Glendinning Street, Balmoral.

**Image Date:** 08/01/02

**EXTENT OF LISTING:**

To the extent of: 1. All the buildings and all the land including the main hall, the supper room, the bowling club facilities and the bowling green.

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## **PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:**

The Balmoral Mechanics Institute and Hall is a single storey, symmetrical red brick hall, built in 1888, with various 20th century brick extensions and additions. The hall is located on the south west side of Glendinning Street in the centre of the township. The roofs are corrugated iron. The main building adopts the usual form for mechanics institutes with a central front door, rooms to either side with single arched windows, and a main hall beyond. It also echoes the conventional classical style of architecture frequently used for mechanics institutes, although much abstracted compared with nineteenth century examples. The various alterations and extensions have been relatively sympathetic.

The most important extension is the 1957 memorial supper room which is built perpendicular to the main hall, on the left hand side. This structure, designed in a post World War Two austere style, has its own square arched entrance from Glendinning Street. The original windows have been replaced in recent years with aluminium framed windows. In 1977 a new structure was built on the right hand side of the main hall to house the bowling club facilities, representing a major shift in the use of the place.

## **HISTORY:**

The Mechanics Institute movement 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 or 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.

Mechanics institutes were very important for country towns, reflecting a sense of community, progress and culture. They were largely a middle class phenomenon notwithstanding their working class origins in Scotland and England, being run by and for the more successful members of the community. They were often supported financially and in kind by the surrounding 'gentry' while the true 'mechanics' were often excluded by rules, regulations and fees. Classicism was the invariable choice for an architectural style however there is a great range in quality and interpretation.

Land was permanently reserved for a Mechanics Institute and Free Library in the 1860 survey for the Balmoral Township Plan. It was in the centre of the township, adjacent to the Anglican Church Reserve and close to the market place, since subdivided. According to the Hamilton Spectator, "A meeting was convened by Mr. C Wood to take steps to form a Mechanics Institute and Library. Twenty-six pounds was collected on the spot when a subscription list was opened. It was proposed to rent the old or new courthouse. Mr. Wood was appointed secretary pro tem." (HS 17/05/1877, 4). Less than a month later a meeting at the primary school was advised that nearly 40 pounds had been collected and that the old court house was to be leased at an annual rent of 10 pounds with the option of purchase at the end of that time for 50 pounds. Mr. C Wood was appointed President, Rev. James Henderson, Vice-president, and Mr. James Cuzens Secretary and Treasurer (ibid. 21/06/1877, 6). The old court house had been described the previous year as a miserable, tumble-down shed which was not only insecure but too small for its purpose (HS, 07/11/1876, 5). It seems that the building was inadequate for use as Mechanics Institute.

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"Tenders were accepted for the construction of a hall to be called the Mechanics Institute. The plans were prepared by Mr. A G Hill, a civil engineer of Coleraine. A copy of the plan is still in existence. The cost was to be 610 pounds 16 shillings and 8 pence and the work was to be completed in November 1887 however the contractor -- Mr. Barton from Coleraine -- did not finish until March 1888 and so the committee retained his deposit of 16 pounds 4 shillings. The stone for the hall foundations was quarried and cut locally and delivered to the building site. On inspection the engineer refused to pass the standard of stone cutting and instructed the contractor to cut another lot. This put the job back to late winter and the carriers carting the stone bogged to their wagon axles. Approximately 50,000 bricks were made locally, probably on the downstream side of the Mather's Creek railway bridge. As a result of working bees over 100 pounds was saved but despite this saving financial trouble was encountered. The banks would not help so it became necessary to raise 265 pounds in debentures taken up locally at 7% interest. The Cuzens brothers Harry and James were the driving force in the hall's construction. Harry Cuzens was the committee's secretary and James its President" (Rogers, 26).

Two of Balmoral's leading figures became involved in a feud, Rogers commenting that "Harry Cuzen's was one of the main forces behind the erection of the hall and a grateful committee made him an honorary life member of the Institute. When in 1891 he was made the President of the Mechanics Institute committee, a row started that went on for three months. John Lang, the licensee of the Squatter's Arms, objected to Harry Cuzens occupying the chair because he was an honorary member and therefore an unfinancial member. During five meetings the Committee fought, tried to vote itself out of office and in the end, a section resigned. After all this Harry Cuzens was still firmly occupying the chair" (ibid., 34)

The hall has had many uses. A debating club met once a month in the late nineteenth century. For a time in 1890-1 it served as a temporary schoolroom while repairs were made to the state school (ibid., 33).

According to McGaffin in 'History of the Shire of Wannon', the Balmoral Mechanics Institute was opened in 1888. "It became the focal point of the district's social life, with dancing, concerts and roller-skating. It replaced the meetings which had to be held in Lang's hotel parlour and the dances on the earthen floor of Cuzen's corrugated iron grocery shed but this is not the existing structure. There was a library and reading room. Later a corrugated iron supper room was added and also backstage dressing rooms. In 1940 the hall was extended and a new floor installed. And in 1957 the Memorial Supper Room replaced the original structure" (McGaffin, 59). The later alteration follows a common post World War One and Two tradition of constructing Memorial Halls or Memorial additions to civic buildings.

A major shift in the use of the place occurred in 1964 when land was swapped with the Anglican Church which enable the bowling green to be established at the corner of Glendinning and Balmoral Streets. St Mary's Sunday School was built on that part of the former Mechanics Institute Reserve fronting Bell Street. This prompted a further extension to the Mechanics Institute in 1977, which provided better facilities and ensured continuing community use.

## **THEMATIC CONTEXT:**

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

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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 building is in very good condition.

**INTEGRITY:**

Low degree of intactness for its nineteenth century fabric but a high degree of intactness for its twentieth century development.

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

What is significant?

The Balmoral Mechanics Institute is a single storey, symmetrical red brick hall, built in 1888, with various 20th century brick extensions and additions. It is located in Glendinning Street, in the centre of Balmoral. Although land in the centre of Balmoral was reserved for the Mechanic's Institute as early as 1860, the hall was not built until 1888, when the contractor, Mr. Barton from Coleraine built the existing hall to the specifications laid out in plans laid out by Mr. A. G. Hill, an engineer also from Coleraine. The construction was not without difficulties and setbacks. The original building was simple and in the 'stripped' Classical style standard for such buildings. It has served continuously as the town's public hall, the meeting place for clubs and societies, a library and recreation centre and, in the twentieth century, as a cinema. The Mechanics Institute underwent a number of modifications including the addition of corrugated iron supper rooms and changing rooms, and the extension and re-flooring of the hall in 1940. In 1956, the corrugated iron memorial supper room was replaced with a brick structure. These alterations follow a common and pragmatic post-World War One and Two tradition of constructing memorial halls or additions to civic buildings which ensured their continuing community use. Further modifications have facilitated the building's use by the local bowling club which has operated on the adjacent site since 1964, a practical arrangement which has consolidated both institutions. While the building has lost much of its original integrity, the subsequent alterations should be seen as significant in their own right. The building is in good condition.

How is it significant?

The Balmoral Mechanics Institute is of architectural, historical and social significance to the township of Coleraine.

Why is it significant?

The Balmoral Mechanics Institute is of architectural significance as a prominent landmark in the townscape of Balmoral and for its sequence of development. It is historically significant for its association with important local figures who struggled to get the building built. It is of social significance to the community of Balmoral as the main setting for public and social events in the town since the late nineteenth century, for its continuing role as the town's library and for its consolidation with the local bowling club.

**COMPARISON:**

003 Mechanics Institute, Cnr Winter and Pilleau Sts Coleraine

186 Mechanics Institute, Hamilton-Port Fairy Rd, Byaduk

305 Library and War Memorial Hall, McLennan St, Glenthompson

283 Penshurst Memorial Hall, Martin Street, Penshurst

**ASSESSED BY:** tfh

**ASSESSMENT DATE:**

20/01/2002

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## 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
	Hamilton Spectator 21/06/1877	1877	6
	Hamilton Spectator 17/05/1877	1877	4
	Hamilton Spectator 06/11/1877	1877	5
	Mechanics' Institutes The Way Forward, Conference organised by the Kilmore Mechanics' Institute	1998	66
	Rediscovering Mechanics' Institutes, Australian Mechanics'Institute Conference 2000	2000	128
Frances Clancy	The Libraries of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria	2000	
G McGaffin	The Wannon Shire Centenary, 1872-1972: a brief history of the Shire of Wannon	1972	59
George Nadel	Australia's Colonial Culture, Ideas, Men and Institutions in Mid-Nineteenth Century Eastern Australia.	1957	var.
Lyall Harris with the Balmoral Historical Society	Welcome Back to Balmoral	1975	
R. W Connell & T. H Irving	Class Structure in Australian History, Documents, Narrative and Argument	1980	var.
W. J. (Jack) Rogers	Balmoral	1967	26