Heritage Overlay No.: 079
Citation No.: 213
Place: Former Melton Mechanics' Institute

Other Names of Place: None
Location: 222-230 High Street, Melton
Critical Dates: Removal of hall (now demolished) to the site: late 1890s; building of brick façade: 1910; enlargements and alterations: 1925; demolition of rear hall and replacement by the present Melton Community Hall: 1983.
Existing Heritage Listings: None
Shire of Melton Historical Themes: 'Community'
Recommended Level of Significance: LOCAL

Statement of Significance:

The former Mechanics' Institute building, at 222-230 High Street, Melton, built 1910, has significance as a predominantly intact example of an elegant Late Victorian style and for its associations with the development of the local Mechanics' Institute, an organization that was first established in Melton in 1868. The building was at the core of the social life of Melton, particularly during the early twentieth century, and to a lesser extent until the site was transferred to the Shire in 1982. It remains as a landmark of the Melton townscape.

The former Mechanics' Institute building, at 222-230 High Street, is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level (AHC D2, E1). It demonstrates original design qualities of a rudimentary Late Victorian style. These qualities include the rendered parapet with the projecting cornice and flanking parapet piers, central decorative brick parapet and timber flagpole above the main entrance, panelled timber double entrance doors and fanlight accentuated by the rendered drip mould, and the two bays of round arched timber framed double hung windows featuring drip moulds and stringcoursing. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the symmetrical composition, single storey height, face brick wall construction, stringcourse forming the horizontal band at window sill height on the front façade, hipped roof form clad in galvanised corrugated steel and the face brick chimney with the projecting, rendered and corbelled top.

Although the original hall at the rear was demolished, and a new Community Hall was added adjacent to it in 1983, the three dimensional form and design of the Institute building is intact.
The former Melton Mechanics' Institute building, at 222-230 High Street, is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A4, B2). It expresses the movement for education and self improvement and an informed participatory democracy which swept across Victoria in the latter nineteenth century, as well as a need for facilities for entertainment and community life in rural towns from the 1890s. It also represents community life in an era before electronic communication and the motor car became widespread, and when municipalities responsibilities were limited to provision of physical infrastructure services.

The Mechanics' Institute hall (demolished) and the library played a central role in the story of Melton social life, and in the development of its learning, culture, entertainment, celebration, commemoration and many community groups. The building on the site today - with the Court House the only remaining early community or public building remaining in High Street - is a tribute to the energy and talents of the very small Melton community over many years. Its substantial size, brick materials, and the evident use of an architect in its design, sets it apart from most other simple weatherboard Mechanics' Institutes that were built in smaller country towns in Victoria. The financing and upkeep of this building, which was community-owned until 1982, and built on land purchased by the community rather than granted by Government, itself contributed to the coming together of the Melton community in decision making and fundraising. Although the original hall is demolished, the 1983 Melton Community Hall adjacent is partly its successor, demolition of the Institute hall having been predicated on its construction.

The surviving brick front portion of the Institute was opened by the Hon. J Murray, Premier of Victoria in 1910.

The former Mechanics' Institute building, at 222-230 High Street, is socially significant at a LOCAL level (AHC G1). It is recognised and valued by the Melton community as having been an important meeting place for cultural and recreational activities, and continues to make a significant contribution to the sense of place in Melton.

Overall, the former Mechanics Institute building, at 222-230 High Street, is of LOCAL significance.

Description:

The former Mechanics Institute building, at 222-230 High Street, Melton, is set within an open grassed reserve with brick pedestrian paving and perimeter plantings. The building has a small front setback comprising two garden beds flanking a central brick path with recent shrubs and poplars.

The symmetrical, single storey, face brick, elegant Late Victorian styled Mechanics Institute building is characterised by a rendered parapet with a projecting cornice and flanking parapet piers. The parapet is punctuated by a central decorative brick parapet and timber flagpole above the main entrance. The entrance has early panelled timber double doors with a fanlight above that is accentuated by a rendered drip mould. Flanking the entrance are two bays of round arched timber framed double hung windows featuring drip moulds and stringcoursing. Another stringcourse forms a horizontal band at window sill height.

Other early features of the design include the hipped roof behind parapet (which is clad in galvanised corrugated steel) and the early face brick chimney with a projecting, rendered and corbelled top.

The whole parapet was orginally surmounted by a repeating pattern of urn or bulb shaped decorations. This was removed at an unknown date for safety reasons. Otherwise the façade is substantially intact.

To the east and rear of the former Institute building is the more recent Shire of Melton Community Hall. Although historically directly linked to the original hall, which it replaced, and with links also to the Satellite City phase of Melton's development, this building is not proposed for inclusion as a part of the site. It may be worthy of consideration in a future heritage study.

History:

The Mechanics Institute Movement

The Mechanics Institute movement flourished in Victoria from 1839 to 1950.[1] It was based on the development of Mechanics' Institutes in Scotland and England from the 1820s, which were intended to educate and enlighten the working classes. The term 'mechanic' in those days meant an artisan, craftsman or working man, especially those who had moved from rural areas to work in new city factories during the Industrial Revolution. The early Institutes were usually equipped with a reading room, a library and a lecture room. Although enjoying mixed success in Britain, they contributed to the development of public education and library services.

The movement was adopted more enthusiastically in the colonies. It began slowly in Victoria but its expansion after the gold rushes population influx was rapid, especially in rural areas. Every suburb and town wanted to have a Mechanics' Institute. During the 1850s approximately forty Institutes were established, with even greater growth in the period 1860 to 1900. By 1900 there were 400 Institutes in Victoria.

The establishment of a Mechanics' Institute was often a great achievement for a local community, requiring organising committees to raise substantial funds for a building site (where this had not been granted by the Government), and the building. Once built, the committee then had to purchase books, provide a caretaker or librarian, and finance the ongoing use of and improvements to the building. 'The history of many Institutes is a story of tremendous community effort, and often, financial difficulties'.[2]

In addition to being monuments to local enterprise and community life, the Mechanics' Institutes played a vital role as an intellectual forum, and in contributing to an informed and

[1] The information for this section is mostly taken from Baragwanath, P, Hodgson, J, *An Inventory of Mechanics' Institutes in Victoria*, Vol.1 (DNRE, Historic Places Section, September 1998), pp.iii-vi.
[2] *ibid*, p.iv.

participatory democracy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They provided journals and other reading matter on local, state, national and international issues, and hosted of lectures and held debates about wider issues such as Federation, colonial nationalism, defence, female suffrage, the price of land and labour.[3]

With the development of the school and technical education in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the need for community technical and adult education declined. As a result of the introduction of government library grants in 1867, many Mechanics' Institutes incorporated a free library in their buildings to finance collection of their books. By 1884-85, there were 257 free libraries in Victoria. However, government support and library grants dropped off in the 1890s depression.

Entertainment took on a greater role in the 1890s, with the introduction of moving pictures, billiards rooms, games rooms (chess), concerts and dances.

The First World War had a devastating impact on many rural communities, and some Mechanics' Institutes were no longer viable. On the other hand the early twentieth century was also a time of agricultural development, and many country towns were growing in this period. The 1930s depression further limited growth of many libraries and reduced grants substantially. In response many Mechanics' Institutes were renamed, for example as memorial halls, in order to retain and attract more patrons (eg at nearby Sunbury). The diminishing role for Mechanics' Institutes and the preference for larger and better appointed halls (with supper rooms, cloak rooms etc) resulted in demolition of some small Institutes.

The advent of cars, radios, and television also provided other opportunities for recreation, learning and entertainment. The greater role of municipalities in providing library services also eroded the need for free libraries.

While over 500 Mechanics' Institutes or halls are extant, very few of these retain their original role as 'diffusers of useful knowledge'. Most are still available for community purposes, as venues for meetings, socials, civic occasions etc, while others are employed as museums, shops and theatres. Most buildings are on Crown land, and managed by a delegated committee of management, who are responsible for raising revenue to maintain aging buildings. Many of those which were originally established on private land, such as Melton, have since reverted back to the Crown, and municipal Councils.

The most common Mechanics Institute building form is the simple weatherboard gable building with iron roofs, notable for their 'honest simplicity' rather than as 'monuments of the ancients'.[4] At the other extreme there are some magnificent two storeyed brick and stucco structures with elaborate ornamentation (as was apparently envisaged by some in Melton in 1905-10).

The Melton Mechanics Institute

Moves to establish a moderately large room for public purposes and a reading room began in 1866, when a correspondent to the Bacchus Marsh and Melton Express reflected on the growth of the community, and pleaded for a reading room to be established in the town, where two or three newspapers would be available for the public.[5] A fundraising concert and ball was

[3] Candy, Philip, 'Ex unitate vires: Mechanics' Institutes and the Federal Ideal', in Baragwanath, P, *If These Walls Could Speak: A Social History of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria* (Mechanics Institute Inc, Windsor, 2000), pp.3-5.

[4] Lovell, P, 'Temples of Learning', in Baragwanath (2000), *op cit*, pp.41-43

[5] *Bacchus Marsh and Melton Express*, 19/9/1866.

consequently held in the Agricultural Society shed, which was enclosed by tarpaulins and lit by kerosine lamps. In April 1867 a committee, comprising Messrs Blackwood, Ross, Beardmore, Graham, Ryan and Lethbridge gave an account of fundraising to date. In July of that year a second entertainment for funds was held 'in the new hall at Golden Fleece Hotel (Shebler's Hall)'.[6] A new committee in 1868, comprising Messrs Ferris, Tulloh, Blackwood, Cameron, Reynolds, Carew, Ross, Barrie, Shebler, Graham, G Minns and Lethbridge, stepped up the drive for money. With a balance of some £22, a reading room was opened in a house (formerly the police station) at the rear of the Golden Fleece. (This bluestone building is now situated in Melton's 'Willows' Historical Park).[7]

On 4th December 1868 the Melton Mechanic's Institute was officially opened in the Agricultural Society shed. It was this unlined building, 'very draughty and cold', that was much later moved to become the nucleus of the old timber and corrugated iron hall in Main Street.[8] By 1870 the 'Mechanics' had been moved to Shebler's hall, and there were calls for a library to be established. In September a lecture on total abstinence was given to a 'fair audience' by local Mr William Ferris.[9] In 1873 however the Institute was reported to be in a 'dilapidated state, having been dormant for two years'. A new committee was appointed, with a subcommittee to select a more centrally located site and to build a hall. In 1882 efforts were made to build a Mechanics' Institute and Library. Apparently, 'like a good many other things', the committee's work 'fell through before the object was accomplished'.[10] As books and furnishings had apparently disappeared, permission was given for the use of the Shire Hall for meetings and a library.[11]

Given the small population of Melton, it is not surprising that progress of the Institute was somewhat chequered. However the coming of the railway, the general farming revival, and beginning of the break-up of the large pastoral estates at the end of the nineteenth century provided growth in the community, and there was new impetus for the development of the Institute in that time.

Much later, in 1925, the *Bacchus Marsh and Melton Express* traced the history of the Mechanic's hall, which 'though it does not extend back to any remote period, is interesting'.[12] It reported that the main hall was originally a privately owned building which faced the opposite direction, having its frontage to Church Street'. In the 'early 1890s' the building was for sale and Mr ST Staughton MLA and Mr R Hornbuckle (who was closely associated with the Melton Mechanics Institute) purchased it in the interests of the Melton public. A public meeting was called and subscriptions received from Mr HW Staughton and other residents of the district.

The building was shifted to Main Street, but well back from the road so as to allow the addition of a suitable front to it. A movement to raise additional funds produced three bazaars in all, which through the efforts of the women of the town raised over £500. Prominent people in these and subsequent efforts included Mr and Mrs G Jongebloed, several branches of the McPherson family, Mr and Mrs JF Minns, Mr and Mrs J Riddell, James Byrnes family, Mr and Mrs JD McKenzie, Rev. Dendy and Messrs McNicoll, Manning, Lang, Chalmer, Kerwin, Atley, Carew, and Nickinson.

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[6] *ibid*, 27/7/1867

[7] Rogers, M, *The Mechanics: A History of the Melton Mechanics' Institute 1866 - 1982* (1985), p.2

[8] *ibid*

[9] *Bacchus Marsh and Melton Express*, 9/4/1870, 21/5/1870, 10/9/1870

[10] Rogers, *op cit*, p.3, citing the *Bacchus Marsh and Melton Express*, July 1898.

[11] *ibid*

[12] *The Bacchus Marsh and Melton Express*, 21st November 1925.

One of the fundraising events for the hall was a lecture, arranged by Alex Cameron, by the Hon. Alfred Deakin MLA (later Prime Minister 1903-1906). At that time Deakin represented West Bourke in the Victorian parliament. The talk raised £3/14/6 (£2/10/6 after expenses were deducted).[13]

Earlier sources give the date of the purchase by Cr Hornbuckle on behalf of a subscription committee, as May 1898, and state that Mr ST Staughton was the chairman of the public meeting held to raise funds for this purchase.[14] The cost of the 'Royal Hall', land, and cottage was £140.

The hall had originally been a produce store erected at the expense of the late Simon Staughton (meaning it probably dated to the 1850s or early 1860s) in the Agricultural showyards. Later the shed was enclosed and floors, doors and windows were put in, 'making it a hall and reading room (ie the Royal Hall)'. Apparently the Mechanics Institute spent over £60 at that time, and in the 1890s its committee tried to obtain the hall from the Government, but was thwarted when the local Agricultural Society held one or two shows to retain the land.[15]

In 1905 the Mechanic's Institute committee met to consider tenders for the demolition of 'the old time building. Mr A Schebler jnr was the lowest tenderer; all 'stones and bricks', and other materials such as 'old flooring, rafters, joists' that were in good condition were to be stored separately for sale.[16] In 1907, it is reported, the Institute committee decided to obtain plans and estimates of enlargements to the hall.[17]

Another source reveals that in 1905 architect William Pitt designed alterations and additions to the Melton Mechanics Institute.[18] Pitt was a prominent nineteenth and early twentieth century architect whose works included the Princess Theatre, Queens Bridge, the Rialto and Olderfleet buildings, the St Kilda Town Hall, the Victoria Brewery, grandstands at Flemington and Caulfield and many other prominent buildings throughout Australia.[19] Pitt was also MLC 1891-1910, and the approach to such a noted architect may have been a private initiative of fellow parliamentarian Staughton.

The Pitt plan shows a different design than the building which was constructed four years later. It was a single storey building effectively the same scale and internal arrangement, with two rooms marked 'office' off the east side of the central corridor leading to the existing hall behind, and a 'billiard room' on the west side of this corridor. It was described as a 'brick and cement' building, and, despite mock quoins on the four front windows, was generally of a relatively modern decorative style, with a rendered front wall and clean straight lines on parapet (surmounted by a flag pole) and front porch.[20]

The 1907 plan for the Melton Mechanics Institute (which might well have been Pitt's) caused much discussion and dissent, and ideas had to be moderated. First hopes were for a two storey

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[13] Alex Cameron, 'Melton Memoirs' (Melton & District Historical Society). This must have been in the 1890s, and it would be no surprise if the lecture had been on either Federation or irrigation, two topics closely associated with Deakin.

[14] Rogers, *op cit*, p.3, citing Melton Express issues of May and July 1898.

[15] Rogers, *op cit*, p.3

[16] *The Bacchus Marsh Express*, 19/8/1905

[17] *ibid*

[18] Lewis, M (ed), Australian Architects Index: Source: Melbourne University Architectural Collections at State Library of Victoria (1 Sheet WD SOC.4. Oct 1905).

[19] Langmore, D, 'William Pitt', in Serle, G (ed), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol.11 (MUP, 1988), pp.239-241.

[20] William Pitt, 'Alterations and Additions to Mechanics Institute, Melton', 24th October 1905.

brick front, but the cost was unrealistic. In 1909 the Institute committee moved that 'a single storey, consisting of three rooms and a passage, at a cost not to exceed £500, be erected and a Foundation Tablet installed'. Throughout this period there were reports of disharmony within the committee, cause unknown, but the tablet received mention.[21]

However, by 1910 the differences within the committee had apparently been resolved.[22] In 1910 the fine new brick front containing several new rooms was opened by the then Premier of Victoria Hon John Murray MLA.[23] On 9th September there was to be an 'Opening Concert and Ball' to mark the occasion.[24]

This addition to the hall would appear to typify later developments in Mechanics' Institutes, wherein the demand for accommodation space meant that 'a single hall no longer sufficed, and reading and meeting rooms were added to the basic brief. In some cases this was accommodated by the addition of new front or side wings.' Many Institutes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century periods became 'little more than a decorated façade attached to the traditional box hall form.' The 'decorated facades and arresting detail [asserted] their place in the community and streetscape.'[25]

'The Mechanics' in the Twentieth Century

The surviving Mechanics Institute minute books (from 1904 only) tell how central this building and institute was in the community life of Melton and district during the twentieth century.

However, like all community organisations, its vitality and viability has fluctuated over time, and its finances have always been precarious. Membership fees in 1904, 5 shillings per annum, did not bring in much money, and gradually membership declined. Some money came from hiring the hall (although hall users invariably asked for remission of at leat part of the hiring costs), and most money had to be raised by special efforts. A caretaker/librarian was employed, although sometimes this was in conjunction with the position of Secretary. These have included Mr F Coburn, Mr Shelly, Mr AG Macdonald (1930-1956) and his son Robert, G. Owen, J.Lugg, and Mr Ed Abrahams and other committee members.

Special fundraising efforts included the 'Caledonian Sports' meeting day (including a concert and ball) in 1905, race meetings in 1914 and 1925, and Queen Carnivals in 1916 and 1931. Local amateur theatre and other groups put on events to raise money specifically for the hall, including: The Melton Social Club (1907), 'The Minstrels (1921), The Jovial Entertainers (1926), the Social and Dramatic Club (1936), the Melton Amateurs (1950s and 60s). From 1934 to 1938 the 'Melton Competitions' assisted. The 'Bay Excursion Committee' made donations for library books, and there were some government grants (for book purchases, until the 1950s). There were many other efforts.[26] The Mechanics Institute required, as well as facilitated, the local community.

Pictures, from silent films to 'talkies', were screened at the 'the Mechanics', and contributed to its upkeep. While there was no woman represented on the committee until 1963, it is clear that women contributed greatly, particularly at working bees, and fundraisers such as Fancy Dress

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[21] Rogers, *op cit*, pp.3-4
[22] *ibid*, p.4
[23] *The Bacchus Marsh and Melton Express*, 21st November 1925
[24] Rogers, *op cit*, p.4
[25] Lovell, *op cit*, pp.41-42.
[26] *ibid*, pp.5-7.

Balls, fetes, dances, euchre parties and many other activities. Community singing in 1934 was a popular effort. Roller skating in 1939 provided cash for a new dance floor (which was installed in 1951). 'Kitchen Teas' at the hall were offered to all young ladies prior to their weddings, table tennis competitions, 'blind concerts' were just part of the life of the hall. Saturday night dances, to the recorded music of Victor Sylvester and others, were held for the war effort. [27]

Rogers summary of the events that took place in the hall highlight its significance at the centre of the community:

> 'It was in constant use and was the scene of many social events, the 'Easter Monday' balls, football, cricket and tennis premiership balls, 'Deb' balls, Queen Carnivals, the Melton Competitions, card parties, Saturday night dances, bazaars, tea meetings, concerts, baby shows, polling booths, meetings of all kinds of groups, exhibitions, dancing classes, picture shows, wedding receptions, birthday parties etc. In the very early days there were singing and painting classes, a Quadrille Club (1909), Geisha Club (1914, but I don't know what it was), physical culture classes for men and women (separately of course), Band of Hope meetings, gymnastic clubs, and so on.
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> The Melton State School used the hall for classrooms in 1869 and for assemblies in the 1970s. It has also been the central point for many important occasions in the life of the district: celebration and thanksgiving at the ending of two world wars, 'Back to Melton' celebrations in 1929, switching-on of mains electricity, 1939, to name but a few.
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> Almost every organisation in the town has made use of the hall for some purpose, and many groups have had long regular association. Probably the longest has been by the Melton Masonic Lodge (1928-1982). Others are the Melton Countrywomen's Association (1938-1982); Red Cross (c.1914 - 1981); YLA dancing classes for about twenty years to 1982.
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> Melton's first Baby Health Centre was situated in the hall from 1944 until moving into special accommodation in the new Shire Offices in 1958; Melton and District Historical Association 1968 until moving into 'The Willows' in 1982. The Art & Craft Show was held annually from 1974 until 1981, and was the feature of the official opening of the new Community Hall'.[28]

Names mentioned over the years in working bees and other more regular tasks were WK DeBoos, Mr Lang, Messrs Wraith, Dixon, McGuire, Ring, Raleigh, and Mrs and Miss Abraham.[29] Long serving committee members were Mr EW (Bon) Barrie (47 years), AG Macdonald (41 years), Ken Beasy (37 years), and HG Abraham (35 years).[30]

Originally lighting had been by kerosine lamp, and then, in 1906, acetyline lamps represented a major step forward. In 1921 a new (temperamental) electricity plant was installed for 'The Mechanics'. Mabel Rogers, the author of the history of the Institute, described the Mechanics in the 1930s as being an 'oasis of light in the dark street'.[31] The 'great day' in 1939 when mains electricity came to Melton was celebrated by a 'Switching On Ball' at the Mechanics.[32]

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[27] *ibid*, p.14
[28] *ibid*, pp.1-2
[29] *ibid*, p.7
[30] *ibid*, p.8
[31] *ibid*, p.1
[32] *ibid*, p.6

In 1904 the stage was enlarged, and altered again in 1921. New doors, footlights followed.[33] In 1925 the *Bacchus Marsh and Melton Express* reported on the 're-opening' of the Mechanics Institute hall after enlargements and alterations. It was predicted that the 'grand ball' to celebrate the occasion, with the five piece band of Miss Ross, would be 'a great event in the history of Melton'. A splendid attendance was assured, as 'the Mechanics is something that every resident of the district has an interest in'. A 'Back to Melton' invitation had been extended, and Mr RT Hjorth MLA, and Mr and Mrs STS Staughton of Eynesbury had accepted invitations.[34]

There were few further improvements to the library and hall. In 1935 new scenery was installed, mainly through the fundraising efforts of a Miss Joye Phiddian, and new sets of stage curtains were acquired. In 1950 the Melton Amateurs enlarged the stage by removing the proscenium and covering the footlights area. In 1954 the Council and the Institute jointly arranged erection of a public convenience beside the hall. Jim Gillespie and Ted Radford made alterations to facilitate access to the supper room and storage. Painting was carried out many times, the last being by the Apex Club. The 'fancy parapet' on the hall façade was removed for public safety.[35]

However, while more and more upkeep was required, most of the work was left to the Institute committee members. A new hall had been mooted since 1947, and in 1963 a public meeting to discuss the future of the MMI moved to support plans to renovate the hall, and promised donations of at least £300. The old hall was strengthened, repaired and painted. In 1970 the stumps under the dance floor required replacement, 'a mighty effort by Messrs C. Finch, K&J Gillespie, EW Barrie and others.[36] In 1972 the old hall piano was sold.[37]
For the library in particular the times were changing. In 1957 a leaking roof spoiled many of the library books. In 1966 the library had been in disuse for many years and was cleared to enable the room to be used for other purposes. Some of the shelving was used to make storage for mats for the bowling club. Most books were taken to the rubbish tip; some that were salvaged are now at The Willows. An overdraft interest of 5% had remained a continual problem for the Mechanics Institute until in 1967 a steady income was realised by letting two rooms as a doctors clinic, and the Mechanics at last became solvent.[38]

Melton was no longer a small community. The outdated old hall did not meet modern expectations, and the lack of convenience and space was a deterrent when newcomers inspected the building.[39] In 1980, after lengthy discussions it was decided that the buildings and land should become the responsibility of the Shire of Melton. The Council would be required to demolish the old hall and build a new hall within two years. On 17th December 1982 the trustees of the Mechanics Institute transferred ownership of the site and buildings to the Council. The contents of the hall were donated to the Lions and Apex clubs, the Melton Masonic Lodge, and the Melton Historical Society.[40]

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[33] *ibid*, p.7
[34] *The Bacchus Marsh and Melton Express*, 21st November 1925.
[35] Rogers, *op cit*, p.14
[36] Rogers, *op cit*, pp.7-8
[37] *ibid*, p.12
[38] *ibid*, pp.6-7
[39] *ibid*, p.9
[40] *ibid*, p.9; Baragwanath, P. *If These Walls Could Speak: A Social History of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria* (Mechanics Institute Inc, Windsor, 2000), p.195.

On 27th May 1983 Mr Evan Walker, Minister for Planning, opened the new $800,000 Melton Community Hall on the site made available by the Melton Mechanics' Institute.[41] The new multipurpose hall, beside the retained front brick portion (the 1910 building), was built on the land, and achievements of the defunct Mechanics Institute, and its original hall.

On 16th March 1984 the Melton Mechanics' Institute committee held its final meeting.[42]

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Shire of Melton Historical Themes: 'Community'

Comparable Places in Shire of Melton:

The building once compared with the 1910 weatherboard Victoria Hall, built by the Melton South community in Brooklyn Road (also transferred to the Council, but now demolished).[43] The most comparable Melton building in terms of community use is the adjacent 1983 Melton Community Hall, which is in part a successor of the Mechanics' Institute hall, which it replaced.

Other Mechanics' Institute buildings in the Shire are the Rockbank Hall, a timber inter-war building. The Toolern Vale Mechanics' is a modern hall (1965), rebuilt after the fire that destroyed the original brick Mechanics' Institute (the largest public hall in the Shire at the time of its construction c.1884[44]), and most of the rest of the town. Apparently a Mechanics' Institute was built at Diggers Rest in the 1850s,[45] and a Mechanics' Institute (apparently new) was listed in the Municipal Directory in 1922, but nothing remains there now.

Comparable Types of Places in Victoria:

Pam Baragwanath in *If the Walls Could Speak: A Social History of Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria*, [46] states that by the 1940s, there were over 1000 Institutes in all areas of Victoria. In 2002, at least 500 of these Institutes remained, the majority in their original form and usage – that of a public facility or a library. Other brick Mechanics Institutes built in the very early twentieth century like the Melton Institute include the following:

- Allansford Mechanics Institute, built 1911;
- Bostocks Creek Mechanics Institute & Free Library, built 1913;
- Bright Free Library, built 1910;
- Brim Memorial Hall (former Mechanics Institute), built 1919;
- Buckranganyule Hall (former Mechanics Institute), built 1909;
- Heathcote Mechanics Institute, built 1900;
- Natimuk Memorial Hall (former Mechanics Institute), built 1909;
- Rushworth Mechanics Institute and Library, built 1914;
- Wahgunyah School of Arts, built 1912;

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[41] Rogers, *op cit*, p.1
[42] *ibid*, p.12
[43] Curry, A, 'Victoria Hall, 32 Brooklyn Street', Essay, 19th April 1993.
[44] Macdonald, Bob, *History of Melton* (October 1969), p.13
[45] Baragwanath (2000), *op cit*, p.9
[46] Baragwanath, (2000), *op cit*.

- Whorouly Library Hall, built 1907;
- Former Wodonga Free Library, built 1915;
- Wonga Park Hall and Mechanics Institute, built 1907;

Most of the above Institute buildings have experienced alterations and additions over time. Of these buildings, the Melton Institute is of equal if not greater design quality.

Condition:

The building appears to be in good condition.

Integrity:

The 1910 building is substantially intact, with only the pediment removed.

Recommendations:

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay.

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

External Paint Controls:	*Yes*
Internal Alteration Controls:	*No*
Tree Controls:	*No*
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	*No*

Other Recommendations:

- Opportunities are available to reconstruct the urns (or orbs) that originally surmounted the parapet, and replacement of the doors to the street rather than having recessed doors**,** using any available historical photographs as a guide.