

WARRACKNABEAL LADIES REST ROOMS



2021, Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms northern elevation



2022, Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms, view south along Scott Street



2022, Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms, western elevation



2022, Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms, sitting room inside the front door



2022, Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms, view out front door from main lounge room. Movable screen shown on RHS



2022, Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms, view of main lounge area and moveable screen



2022, Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms, view into baby change area



2022, Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms, fireplace in kitchen



2022, Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms, kitchen sink area



2022, Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms

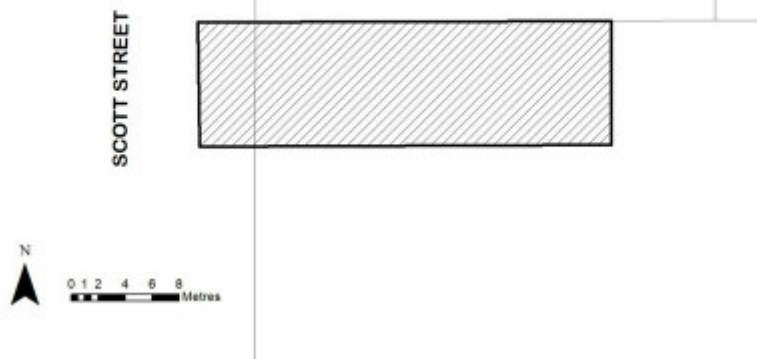


2022, Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms, back door & covered area



2022, Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms, Boys sign, front sitting room

DIAGRAM 2445



Registration diagram

Location

121 SCOTT STREET WARRACKNABEAL, YARRIAMBIACK SHIRE

Municipality

YARRIAMBIACK SHIRE

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2445

VHR Registration

October 12, 2023

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - October 10, 2023

What is significant?

The Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms, a single storey brick building constructed in 1928 by Andrew Taylor and Sons and the following objects integral:

1. Moveable privacy screen (matching the central and rear partition walls)
2. All Welcome - Silver Coin Donation (sign)
3. Boys Admitted up to the Age of Six years (sign)
4. No Responsibility for Parcels (sign)
5. Framed life members honour roll (Tarrant to Woodward)
6. Life members honour board (commencing 1940)
7. Collection of five visitors books from 1928–2023
8. Collection of eight books with lists of members from 1947–1980
9. Three small books with Records of pram and pushcart rentals from 1941–1977
10. Book recording the Presidents and Secretaries from 1926–2005
11. Signed petition to the shire from 109 women of the district (1944)

How is it significant?

The *Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms* is of historical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

Criterion B

Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

Why is it significant?

The Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms are historically significant for their capacity to demonstrate the Women's Rest Rooms movement of the early twentieth century. From the early 1920s, organisations such as the Country Women's Association (CWA) and Victorian Farmer's Union (VFU) established 'Rest Rooms' in rural towns across Victoria. Initially developed in response to a lack of women's public toilets, baby change areas and suitable indoor places to wait for male family members conducting business, these facilities became community hubs for women and part of the social fabric of regional Victoria. The Women's Rest Rooms movement was an important phase in Victoria's history which has all but disappeared. The Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms was first proposed by the Country Progressive Party Women's Section in 1926 and opened in 1928. The building survives to this day (2023) and is still serving its original intended function. It is a much loved place for generations of women in the Wimmera, and one of the few remaining Women's Rest Rooms still in use in Victoria and Australia. (Criterion A)

The Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms are historically significant for their rarity as possibly the last remaining operating Women's Rest Rooms in Victoria. From the 1920s over an estimated 200 were established in rural towns, but the popularity of the facilities declined from the 1970s. Warracknabeal Rooms are unusually intact and have been preserved largely 'as they were' by generations of dedicated local women of the committee since 1928. An integral part of the place, its collection is rare and includes objects include an early 'Boys Admitted up to the Age of Six Years' sign, records of pram and pushcart rentals, and a collection of visitors books from the 1920s onwards documenting women's experiences of the place over generations. The place and its collection are unparalleled in Victoria. (Criterion B)

Permit Exemptions

General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must **notify** the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

Specific Exemptions:

Specific Permit Exemptions

The works and activities below are not considered to cause harm to the cultural heritage significance of the Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms subject to the guidelines and conditions which follow:

Exempt works and activities

Kitchen area

- Works to maintain or upgrade the kitchen area including like with like repair of kitchen sink unit, splash-back tiles, hot water unit, their removal and replacement where the scale, colour and form remain unchanged.

Rear storage room

- Removal and like for like repair and replacement of the existing towel dispenser.

Toilet block

- Works to maintain or upgrade the three existing toilets cubicles (interior and exterior) including removal and like for like repair and replacement of toilets, toilet roll holders, locks, hand towel dispensers, sinks and disability rails. This does not include painting the doors other than in the same colour, finish and product type.
- Removal and like for like repair and replacement of the roof of the toilet block.

Rear outdoor area

- Removal and like for like repair and replacement of existing hard landscaping.

- Removal and like for like repair and replacement of the lightweight shelter roof outside the back door.
- Removal and like for like repair and replacement of the fences at the boundaries of the property.

Small back shed

- Removal and like for like repair of the small back shed.

Guidelines

1. Where there is an inconsistency between permit exemptions specific to the registered place or object ('specific exemptions') established in accordance with either section 49(3) or section 92(3) of the Act and general exemptions established in accordance with section 92(1) of the Act specific exemptions will prevail to the extent of any inconsistency.
2. *In specific exemptions, words have the same meaning as in the Act, unless otherwise indicated. Where there is an inconsistency between specific exemptions and the Act, the Act will prevail to the extent of any inconsistency.*
3. Nothing in specific exemptions obviates the responsibility of a proponent to obtain the consent of the owner of the registered place or object, or if the registered place or object is situated on Crown Land the land manager as defined in the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*, prior to undertaking works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions.
4. If a Cultural Heritage Management Plan in accordance with the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* is required for works covered by specific exemptions, specific exemptions will apply only if the Cultural Heritage Management Plan has been approved prior to works or activities commencing. Where there is an inconsistency between specific exemptions and a Cultural Heritage Management Plan for the relevant works and activities, Heritage Victoria must be contacted for advice on the appropriate approval pathway.
5. Specific exemptions do not constitute approvals, authorisations or exemptions under any other legislation, Local Government, State Government or Commonwealth Government requirements, including but not limited to the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth). Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to obtain relevant planning, building or environmental approvals from the responsible authority where applicable.
6. Care should be taken when working with heritage buildings and objects, as historic fabric may contain dangerous and poisonous materials (for example lead paint and asbestos). Appropriate personal protective equipment should be worn at all times. If you are unsure, seek advice from a qualified heritage architect, heritage consultant or local Council heritage advisor.
7. The presence of unsafe materials (for example asbestos, lead paint etc) at a registered place or object does not automatically exempt remedial works or activities in accordance with this category. Approvals under Part 5 of the Act must be obtained to undertake works or activities that are not expressly exempted by the below specific exemptions.
8. All works should be informed by a Conservation Management Plan prepared for the place or object. The Executive Director is not bound by any Conservation Management Plan, and permits still must be obtained for works suggested in any Conservation Management Plan.

Conditions

1. All works or activities permitted under specific exemptions must be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents harm to the registered place or object. Harm includes moving, removing or damaging any part of the registered place or object that contributes to its cultural heritage significance.
2. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the registered place are revealed relating to its cultural heritage significance, including but not limited to historical archaeological remains, such as features, deposits or artefacts, then works must cease and Heritage Victoria notified as soon as possible.
3. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any Aboriginal cultural heritage is discovered or exposed at any time, all works must cease and the Secretary (as defined in the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*) must be contacted immediately to ascertain requirements under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.
4. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any munitions or other potentially explosive artefacts are discovered, Victoria Police is to be immediately alerted and the site is to be immediately cleared of all personnel.

5. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any suspected human remains are found the works or activities must cease. The remains must be left in place and protected from harm or damage. Victoria Police and the State Coroner's Office must be notified immediately. If there are reasonable grounds to believe that the remains are Aboriginal, the State Emergency Control Centre must be immediately notified on 1300 888 544, and, as required under s.17(3)(b) of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, all details about the location and nature of the human remains must be provided to the Secretary (as defined in the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*).

Theme

2. Peopling Victoria's places and landscapes 8. Building community life

Construction dates 1928,

Heritage Act Categories Registered place, Registered object integral to a registered place,

Hermes Number 209200

Property Number

History

The Women's Rest Rooms Movement

During the 1920s and 1930s, an unknown number (perhaps over 200) of Women's Rest Rooms were set up across Australia, very few of which survive to this day. The Women's Rest Rooms movement started in Australia after the First World War (1914-18). During the war, large numbers of women joined the Red Cross, gaining skills in organising and fundraising for a range of activities. This experience of mobilisation and camaraderie gave many the confidence to pursue new roles in the public realm after the war, serving their communities in addition to fulfilling their family duties.

The 1920s saw the emergence of groups such as the Country Women's Association (CWA) in Australia, based on the principles of the Women's Institutes in Canada (late 1890s) and Britain (1913). The CWA and other similar groups across Australia were dedicated to the welfare of women and children in rural communities. The CWA motto summed up their purpose: 'Honour to God, Loyalty to the Throne and Empire, Service to the Country through Country Women for Country Women by Country Women'. The idea of 'Women's Rest Rooms' possibly came from similar facilities for wounded soldiers set up during the war. In Melbourne, there was a 'YMCA Rest Room', 'Sailors and Soldiers Rest Rooms' and 'Union Jack Rest Rooms'. Here soldiers met one another, relaxed in a quasi-domestic space and were served tea and refreshments by women volunteers (no alcohol was served).

After the war, the establishment of Women's Rest Rooms was a central goal of emerging rural women's groups. In 1919 the Victorian Country Party's Women's Section declared 'that rest rooms should be established in all country towns'. Rest Rooms addressed two problems: the lack of women's public toilets and a safe indoor space for women on 'shopping days'.

In the early 1900s, it was common for farming families to travel into regional towns every few weeks for a shopping day to buy provisions, visit the bank and the like. After conducting their business, men could socialise in the pub with their male friends and use toilets in the hotel or at garages. But there were no public toilets for women – a phenomenon across the British world. The first public toilet for women in Melbourne was not built until 1902 (Sydney, 1910, and Brisbane, 1912). At that time, public bars along with their toilets were the domain of men, as it was unlawful for women to drink in pubs in Australia until 1965. Certain hotels had a 'ladies lounge', but even so, the prospect of women performing a 'private' function in public or male dominated spaces challenged prevailing cultural ideas of decency.

Women's Rest Rooms provided rural women with much needed toilets and a space to care for babies and young children. They also offered a quiet place for women to chat with friends 'whilst waiting for [their] menfolk to conduct their business in the town', rather than being 'obliged to stand about the streets' or sit in a shop until the family was ready to go home.[3] Rooms were typically membership based and access was granted by a small annual fee. They remained unlocked during the day to allow easy access. There was little of value in the rooms, rather their value lay in being a cosy and social space. Facilities varied from place to place but could include:

- Toilets
- Baby change areas
- Spaces for young children to play
- Stoves for preparing infants food
- Hot water
- Drinking water
- Cups of tea
- Open fires (in winter)
- A cool space (in summer)
- A gifts table with produce and cakes
- Pram hire
- A visitors book.

The Development of Women's Rest Rooms

Women's Rest Rooms started to open in the early 1920s. In Victoria, one of the first was set up in 1922 in Leongatha by the Victorian Farmers' Union. After the establishment of the CWA in NSW in 1922, CWA Rooms were established at Inverell (1924) and [Barellan](#) (1924); the latter being included in the NSW State Heritage Register in 2011. Other states followed, including Bundaberg, QLD (1924) and Donnybrook, WA (1925). By 1953 there were an estimated 182 Rest Rooms in NSW, the state with the largest number of these facilities.

In Victoria, prior to the establishment of the CWA in that state in 1928, Women's Rest Rooms were set up by community organisations, including the Victorian Farmers' Union, town progress associations and local groups – such as the Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms Committee. In these early years, such facilities were sometimes called 'Ladies Rest Rooms' rather than 'Women's Rest Rooms'. In 1932, one commentator reported 15 or possibly 17 rooms in Victoria. Twenty years later there were an estimated 119. The CWA was the largest developer of these facilities, either adapting existing buildings or building new ones.

This list provides a sample Women's Rest Rooms established in Victoria from 1922. Many are no longer extant and/or no longer function as Women's Rest Rooms (see Comparisons section for extant places).

Women's Rest Rooms in Victoria (Prior to the establishment of the CWA of Victoria)

1. 1922, Leongatha, Victoria Farmers' Union.
2. 1924, Geelong, Victoria Farmers' Union, Ladies' Rest Rooms.
3. 1927, Hamilton, Hamilton Progress Association, Ladies' Rest Rooms.
4. 1927, Cobden, Local committee.
5. 1928, Warracknabeal, Country Progressive Party Women's Section, then Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms Committee (opened August 1928)

Women's Rest Rooms in Victoria (Prior to the establishment of the CWA of Victoria)

1. 1928, Terang, CWA (first CWA Women's Rest Room in Victoria, opened August 1928)
2. 1929, Mildura, CWA.
3. <1927, Geelong, affiliation unknown, Malop Street, opposite Winter and Taylor's. (There were a number of Women's Rest Rooms in Geelong)
4. 1929, Sale, CWA, located at the old Methodist parsonage.
5. 1927, Camperdown, affiliation unknown. Rented premises.
6. <1929, Werrimul, affiliation unknown.
7. 1930, Merbein, Merbein Women's Welfare Club
8. <1930, Benalla, CWA.
9. <1931, Myrtleford, CWA

10. 1932, Rutherglen, CWA, Main Street.
11. 1933, Ouyen, CWA, Pickering Street, formerly in Cramenton Hall.
12. 1933, Korrumburra, CWA.
13. 1935, Pyramid Hill, CWA
14. 1938, Nhill, CWA, Victoria Street.

This wave of construction during the 1920s and 1930s was informed by new understandings of public health, women's health and changing attitudes to decency. This era saw improvements in the control of communicable diseases, the establishment of baby health centres and the construction of sewerage systems in regional towns. At the Cobden Rest Rooms in 1928, a local doctor gave a health lecture covering topics such as influenza and venereal disease. In Benalla, some discussion was given to the use of the Rest Rooms for 'baby health centre work'. Women's Rest Rooms were seen as progressive because they recognised and supported women's primary role as wives and mothers. They allowed women to carve out a respectable private space within the public civic landscape and have access to appropriate conveniences that safeguarded their decency. Rest Rooms were also good for baby health, providing clean nappy change areas and food warming facilities. Rural women found friendship and purpose in Rest Rooms which helped break the isolation of life on remote farms. As the use of cars increased in the 1920, so did tourism within Victoria, and Rest Rooms provided much needed facilities for women travellers. From the mid-twentieth century, however, rural city councils began constructing public toilet blocks for men and women, and it is possible that these became preferred rest stops for families. Along with declining rural populations and the movement of women into the paid workforce, the membership of Rest Rooms in Australia fell. The Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms has defied this trend. In 2023 these rooms remain open, are owned and operated by an active local committee and are well patronised.

Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms

In May 1926 a committee meeting of the women's section of the Country Progressive Party Women's Section discussed establishing a rest room for women and children. In September of that year a committee formed, and planning began. The *Warracknabeal Herald* reported the reasons for its establishment:

That such an institution is urgently needed not only in Warracknabeal, but in every country town is wholeheartedly admitted... For many years some place where tired mothers with their children, and ladies generally, could retire for an hour's rest and comfort has been required.

In Warracknabeal there were already a few rest rooms in hotels and the three garages in the town, but women did not use these facilities. There was a view that it was not 'appropriate that ladies and youngsters' visited these places 'when the need arose'. The Ladies Rest Room Committee proceeded to gain support for the planned Rooms from the community, including the local health officer. By 1927 the Committee had raised £450 and decided to purchase their own land and build a new brick building. A block of land became available on Scott Street with a twenty-year lease, and the committee decided on this site. The Borung Shire subleased this land which was eventually bought outright by the committee in 1947.

On 2 March 1928, tenders were called, and builders Andrew Taylor and Sons was awarded the contract. On 10 August 1928 the Ladies Rest Rooms was officially opened. The front room comprised an office and a cloakroom, the large interior room had an open fire. There was a mother's room with fireplace, sink and hand basin, and the three toilet cubicles at the rear had washbasins and mirrors. The final cost of the facility was £700 pounds, raised from communities across the district. It should be noted a town sewerage system was installed in Warracknabeal in 1939, so it is likely that the original toilets involved the collection of 'night soil'.

The Rest Rooms were membership based. Women paid an annual fee and were given a badge with the letters 'WDRR' (Warracknabeal and District Rest Rooms) which enabled entry. News of this fine purpose-built facility spread across regional Victoria. In 1930 a bound visitors book was placed in the rooms, a tradition which continues to this day. In 1931 a caretaker was appointed to clean the rooms and open them each day, and in 1932 a verandah was added to the front of the building. During the 1930s, the committee met with the Shire council to discuss the use of the restrooms as a baby health centre and pram hire service commenced. A framed list of rules was placed near the front door: no drinking, no smoking, and no boys over the age of six. During the 1930s, there were between 46 and 52 members. Numbers increased during the war years.

During the Second World War (1939-45) the rooms became an important community hub, and women raised funds for the Red Cross. In 1946 membership had reached 255, and in 1948 it peaked at 787, declining in the

1950s. In 1950, the back fence was moved an additional depth of 10 feet to take in land that was purchased in 1947. The exterior of the rooms was painted in 1956, and in 1967 the front verandah with timber posts were replaced with a modern cantilevered awning. During the 1970s late night shopping was introduced and women were rostered on to keep the rooms open longer hours. The 1970s also saw a drop in membership numbers to the mid-100s, and in 1987 a new tourist information centre and male/female toilet block opened on the vacant land to the north of the rooms.

During the 1990s, the Warracknabeal rooms started to attract media attention as one of the last remaining Women's Rest Rooms in Victoria. Not only did the place have an intact exterior, but it had been retained 'as it was' by the Committee. There were feature articles in the *Age* (24 October 1990) and the *Weekly Times* (9 March 1994). By this stage, any woman – not just members – could enter with a coin donation. In 2004 the 75th anniversary of the rooms was noted in the *Weekly Times* (19 May 2004). Its 90th anniversary in 2018 was again noted by the *Weekly Times* and celebrated in a book. In 2023, the Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms remains owned and run by a small, dedicated committee. There is still a visitors book, a coin donation box and there is no radio or television to disturb the quiet atmosphere. These days, men are allowed to enter the rooms if they have a good reason (such as changing a baby), but most are mindful that this is a rare surviving 'women's space'.

Entries in the Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms visitors book suggest that 'Rest Rooms' are familiar to older visitors, but unknown to younger visitors. This is not surprising given the lack of surviving places in Victoria and other states. Public comments include:

- 'Incredible, I have never seen this type of rest room' – Jean, 21/9/2018
- 'Thank you :) First time I've seen something like this' – 6/8/2019
- 'Fantastic space, reminds me of Myers & Millers in 1950s' – 21/9/2018
- 'What a wonderful job you all do to maintain these rooms' – Sue, 22/7/2019
- 'This is such a special place to stop on our way to Adelaide' – Joan and Jennifer, 25/9/2023
- 'Have been coming here for 40 years since my first baby' – Maureen', 25/9/2023
- 'Fascinating I never knew about places like this. Thank you' – 25/7/2019
- 'This place reminds me of my youth. What a fabulous little spot' – 16/7/2019
- 'Fantastic to be able to change my baby in a clean and safe space!! Thank you' – Rae, Daisy and Granny 20/7/2022
- 'Thank you very much for letting us use this brilliant room for feeding!' – Juliet and Jude, 24/7/2022
- 'Wish our respective towns had one!!' – 10/8/2022.

Selected bibliography

Andrew May, [Public Toilets](#), eMelbourne: The City Past And Present.
Heritage Victoria, '[Flush' with history: Catering to No 1's and No 2's since 1859](#), 19 May 2021.
Jennifer Jones, 'Inside the CWA Rest Room', *History Australia*, 3:1, 2006, 09.1-09.12.
Graeme Massey, *Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms : 1928-2018 : celebrating 90 years of service to Warracknabeal and surrounding districts*, Warracknabeal, North West Press, 2018.
Brenda Stevens-Chambers, *The Feisty Phoenix: The Real Story of the Country Women's Association of Victoria 1928-2008. 80th Anniversary History*, Country Women's Association of Victoria, Toorak, 2008.

Consultation and interviews

Eileen Sholl, President, and other Committee Members, Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms Committee, 7 October 2022.

Assessment Against Criteria

Criterion

The *Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms* is of historical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

Criterion B

Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

Extent of Registration

Heritage Act 2017

NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the Heritage Act 2017, I give notice under section 53 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including a place in the Heritage Register:

Number: H2445

Category: Registered Place, Registered Objects Integral to a Registered Place

Place: Warracknabeal Ladies Rest Rooms

Location: 21 Scott Street, Warracknabeal

Municipality: Yarriambiack Shire

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 2445 encompassing all of Lot 1 on Title Plan 575748, and part of the Scott Street road reserve extending from the building facade to the kerb, and all the registered objects integral to the place which are listed in the inventory held by the Executive Director, being:

1. Moveable privacy screen (matching the central and rear partition walls)
2. All Welcome – Silver Coin Donation (sign)
3. Boys Admitted up to the Age of Six Years (sign)
4. No Responsibility for Parcels (sign)
5. Framed life members honour roll (Tarrant to Woodward)
6. Life members honour board (commencing 1940)
7. Collection of five visitors books from 1928–2023
8. Collection of eight books with lists of members from 1947–1980
9. Three small books with Records of pram and pushcart rentals from 1941–1977
10. Book recording the Presidents and Secretaries from 1926–2005
11. Signed petition to the shire from 109 women of the district (1944).

Dated 12 October 2023

STEVEN AVERY

Executive Director

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/>