
Mechanics Institute, 113 - 121 Sturt Street, Ballarat



Mechanics Institute - Film 7 /
Frame 35 - Ballarat
Conservation Study, 1978



Mechanics Institute -Ballarat
Mechanics' Institute, 1873.
(photograph: from Annual
Report, 1873, reproduced in
McCallum, a History of
Ballarat Libraries.) Ballarat
Conservation Study, 1978

Location

113 - 121 Sturt Street BALLARAT CENTRAL, BALLARAT CITY

Municipality

BALLARAT CITY

Level of significance

Incl in HO area indiv sig

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H0987

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO114

HO171

Heritage Listing

Ballarat City

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - July 1, 1978

Part of Recommended Area A1.1

No SoS provided in this citation. Please refer to descriptions, history, construction, loc govt, listings and images sections in this place record for further information.

Heritage Study/Consultant Ballarat - Ballarat Conservation Study, Jacobs Lewis Vines Architects, 1978;

Other Names Vegas Cinema,

Hermes Number 123566

Property Number

Physical Description 1

The foundation stone of the rear hall was laid on 28 September 1860, the architect was Charles Boykett. Contractors were Messrs.Francis and Watson, the contract su

£1985. Boykett's design for the later front section was superseded by the design of J.H.Jones. This section was opened on 21 July 1869. The hall of the original Mining Exchange was taken over when the new Exchange was built and is now the reading room and library. The building is an unusual but perhaps not an entirely successful composition in two large projecting bays and a narrower centre section over the arched entry. This also incorporates a recessed balcony covered by a compressed hemicycle above and an open balcony above this surmounted by a large female statue. The side bays are simply fenestrated with arched and square windows set between pilasters of representational masonry. The roof has been rebuilt removing the widow's walk, and the ground floor shopfronts and doors altered and an insensitive awning verandah constructed in lieu of the earlier post supper verandahs. This building is of importance on both architectural and historical grounds. It is a unique combination of elements and the library interior is of major importance. The building has strong historical associations with many of Ballarat's founding fathers and the buildings were impressive structures for their period of constructional.

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Intactness

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Physical Description 2

"The Mechanics Institute in Sturt Street was born in April 1859, in a little wooden house between Humffrey & Barkly Streets, in Main Street, and its first reading-room was opened, as was afterwards the Ballarat East Public Library, in the engine-house of the Ballarat Fire Brigade. On the 20th of April, 1859 the first committee was chosen (H.R.Caselli & W.B.Withers were both members). The first stone of the first part of the Sturt Street building was laid with Masonic honours by Mr.H.Cuthbert on the 28th of September 1860, and on the 19th of December the reading room was opened. The room has since been enlarged, and is now the most spacious of the kind in the colony." 1

The Ballarat Star of 28 September 1860 gave more information regarding this building. "As many of our readers are already aware (the building) comprises two stories, with a lecture hall and offices on the upper storey and below a reading room, library, class rooms, offices and shops in front, the architect being Mr.Charles Boykett. Of the design only a part will now be erected, namely the hall and the apartments comprised in the space underseal. For the shell of this work the contract has been taken by Messrs.Francis and Watson for 11985 the front portion of the site being left unoccupied in the meantime. The height of the hall will be 25 feet and 8 windows will admit light to this splendid room, twenty pilasters with moulded bases and capitals, adding strength and beauty to the whole.. The works at present contracted for will cost as we have seen 11985, but the furnishing and fitting will swell the amount to £3500."

There would appear to have been a change in plan as the buildings were not completed to the original plans as described above. The Sturt Street building was completed to the design of J.H.Jones and Withers describe it as one of the largest and handsomest in the town. It was opened for a fine arts exhibition. by His Excellency the Governor on 21st July 1869.

The library now appears to incorporate the former Mining Exchange hall which was constructed adjacent to the early hall with an entrance from Sturt Street. This is shown in Nettleton's "Views of Victoria" photograph of Sturt Street. This is where mining transactions were carried out at the corner before the construction of the extant Mining Exchange Building.

Alterations and additions include the billiard room which was opened in February 1879. 2 In 1901 Clegg, Ke11 and Miller carried out alterations to the hall; Clegg and Miller designed brick additions in 1905 and shopfront alterations in 1911. In 1932 Clegg and Morrow undertook alterations to the Britannia Picture Theatre followed by alterations to conveniences in 1935 by the same firm. 4

The Mechanics Institute, Sturt Street facade, is an unusual but perhaps not entirely successful composition of two large three storey pavilions flanking a rather curious heterogeneous central panel. It comprises an arched entrance at ground floor level with sculptured relief panels in the spandrels above the arch itself, a slightly projecting balconette at the first floor level in front of a recessed alcove containing a bank of slender windows beneath a sort of compressed hemicycle, with a projecting keystone scroll and wreaths in the spandrel. Above this, at second storey level is an unroofed recessed balcony (from which the iron balustrading has been removed) with undersized French doors in three openings united by a single cornice canopy above which is a large statue, presumably of Minerva.

The pavilions themselves contain a row of attic lights above the line of the original verandah roof. (There were two verandahs - the first was two separate post-supported sections open at the central entrance, the later was similar but with a central transverse barrel vault over the entrance.) In the two floors above there are arched and square headed windows at first and second floor respectively. These are set between simple pilasters and antae of representational masonry and a solid panel parapet carrying ornamental terminals. The roof has been rebuilt, the widow's walk and chimney capping removed. The external carcass of the building otherwise has seen little change. The earlier hall, now a cinema, is quite impressive from Lewis Street at the rear, although the interior has seen many modifications.

Internally the only intact areas are parts of the club rooms, the stair to the front section of the building (a fine staircase with octagonal skylight rising to a peak, now blocked in by later roofing). The principal interest lies in the library which was formerly the trading hall of the original Gold Exchange. It is very plainly decorated with a modern resheeted ceiling, but a very grand skylight in four bays in which beams run across the ceiling level and have pendant pineapple like bosses or perhaps bunches of grapes. There is a dentillated cornice around the outer edge of the skylight, and above are plain pilasters rising in each bay to divide off four lights of windows and at the end a semicircular sort of half wheel window. Above that level is another cornice with brackets. all around the skylight, and again this continues across as beams in the divisions between the bays. There is a simple glazed roof above that.

The exterior of the building is substantially intact with. the following exceptions - shopfronts and central entry doors, a modern awning which insensitively runs through the arched entry, the central advertising sign for the picture theatre, the removal of balcony balustrade, widow's walk and chimney capping. The interior has been largely remodelled, except as noted above.

This building is of importance on both -architectural and historical grounds.

It is a unique combination of elements, and the library interior is of major importance. Historically it has had association with the earliest period of Ballarat and some of its most prominent citizens. Both sections are of early dates; the hall 'is the oldest surviving in Ballarat, and the front facade was of an impressive scale for.-its time with many elaborate decorative devices.

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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/>