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## Shops and Residentces



HO106 - Former Mechanics  
Institute, 215-217 Nicholson  
Street, Footscray.JPG

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### Location

4-10 Buckley Street and 215-217 Nicholson Street FOOTSCRAY, MARIBYRNONG CITY

### Municipality

MARIBYRNONG CITY

### Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

### Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO106

### Heritage Listing

Maribyrnong City

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### Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is significant?

The two storey row of brick and stucco offices, shops and dwellings was erected in 1890 on part of a triangular Crown reserve bounded by Napier, Nicholson and Buckley Streets set aside for the Footscray Mechanics Institute in 1886.

As a form of income for the Mechanics Institute trust, prominent local architect and Footscray councillor Charles James Polain and builder James Rawsthorn leased the corner of Nicholson and Buckley streets for a commercial development (from December 1890- 1912): they designed and built the row of shops, offices and dwellings. Polain was the principal resident architect within the Western region of Melbourne, being responsible for a number of distinctive and significant designs. Polain was also nationally known for his starting gate invention used in horse racing. This building was his office for a time.

The Footscray Mechanics Institute Trust continued to own and lease the building after the initial Polain lease, housing some locally notable tenants as well as the Footscray Institute of Technology.

#### Contributory elements

The contributory elements within the heritage place include (but not exclusively):

- . Parapeted and trabeated form based on classical sources in the English Queen Anne revival manner;
- . Red brick walls, corbel-top chimneys and cement mouldings;
- . Double-hung sash windows timberframed windows;
- . Cement mouldings and detailing and their distinctive application;
- . The angled plan form aligning with the street configuration;
- . Professional office character of the Nicholson Street facade, with limited shopfront application; and
- . The former retail character of Buckley St with original shopfront divisions still visible.

#### How is it significant?

Polain's shops, offices & dwelling row is historically, architecturally and aesthetically significant to the City of Maribyrnong and locality of Footscray.

#### Why is it significant?

Polain's shops, offices & dwelling row is significant to the City of Maribyrnong and locality of Footscray because:

##### Historically:

The shop, office and dwelling row evokes an unusual development scheme where a Crown Reserve was used to create an income stream for the Footscray Mechanics Institute trustees that allowed the erection of the significant Mechanics Institute building to the east.

The trustees who commissioned this development were among some of the more prominent artisans or working men in the Footscray community who had aided in the development of services (including the mechanics institute) within this largely working class community at a local and government level.

As well as the close association with locally important men in the Western Region such as Clark, Sims, and Mitchell, the building's designer Charles Polain achieved fame nationally as the inventor of a patented starting gate, first used at Flemington racecourse, as well as for his design skill within the region.

Part of the building was also used for the Footscray Institute of Technology during its infancy and was sited within Footscray's civic centre of the Victorian and Edwardian-eras.

##### Architecturally and Aesthetically:

As an uncommon form of Charles Polain's commercial work, the row has his trademark distinctive cement detailing and follows the rising British Queen Anne revival manner previously seen in landmark residential examples such as Queen Bess Row in East Melbourne.

Hermes Number 124959

Property Number

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## Physical Description 1

Unusually sited to front two angled streets, this two-storey red brick and stucco shop and dwelling row originally had five tenancies facing Buckley Street and two or sometimes three facing Nicholson Street. The architectural style follows an English Queen Anne approach to classicism with the use of red brick, rather than the stucco typically used on Victorian-era commercial facades, relieved by cement detailing.

The two main parapeted elevations are divided by cemented (upper level ) and shaped (ground level) brick pilasters to suggest trabeated facades, each facade bay having a double-hung sash window or window pair centred on the upper level. The Nicholson Street elevation has seven facade bays, Buckley Street has five.

Polain's distinctive use of composition and detail includes the well-judged symmetry of the main Buckley Street elevation as compared to the asymmetry of the Nicholson Street elevation; parapet piers centred on window pediments, bifurcated parapet pediments with segmentally arched raised entablatures; irregular placement of upper level entablature pediments over some windows and not others; use of stylised keystones over the balance of the upper level windows. Many of the parapet balls remain and most buildings in the row have a chimney.

The corner of Nicholson and Buckley Streets is splayed with a blind upper level window and ground level doorway flanked by timberframed shopfronts in Buckley and Nicholson Streets. The crowning corner parapet pediment has a cartouche within the pediment, flanked by sunflowers shopfront entry recesses, presumably with associated timber-framed shopfronts. All of these original shopfronts along Buckley Street have been replaced or removed with the two shopfronts remaining near the corner being symbolic of what would have been timber-framed joinery set over a masonry plinth.

In Nicholson Street there appears to be little change with a commercial or office character evoked by double-hung sash windows with moulded cement architraves and doors at ground level rather than shopfronts. A large new opening with a roller shutter, allowing entry to the courtyard formed from former shop back yards, signals a former shopfront at this point which corresponds with the MMBW 1895 plan. A door has been added at the west end of the elevation.

The shopfront replacements in Buckley Street (with typically red brick walls and plain cement banding) are however visually related to the rest of the building, specifically the Nicholson Street elevation, and do not present the usual clash of aesthetic seen in the nearby aluminium shopfronts with associated signage applied to Victorian-era shops. Some of the original brickwork has been painted.

The south end elevation has a scalloped return parapet and over-painted red brickwork. A large sign has been added. The communal courtyard formed by amalgamation of former fenced rear yards has changes to openings but a painted Phillips light globe promotion sign on the rear of the east end of the Nicholson Street facade states '.Meagher 15 Buckley Street..'

Significant or contributory elements at the place include:

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- . Red brick walls, corbel-top chimneys and cement mouldings;
- . Double-hung sash windows timberframed windows;
- . Cement mouldings and detailing and their distinctive application;
- . The angled plan form aligning with the street configuration;

- . Professional office character of the Nicholson Street facade, with limited shopfront application;
- . The former retail character of Buckley St with original shopfront divisions still visible.

*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/>*