# Clocktower Centre



Clocktower Essendon.jpg



Essendon town hall 1906.jpg

## Location

750 Mt Alexander Road MOONEE PONDS, MOONEE VALLEY CITY

## Municipality

MOONEE VALLEY CITY

## Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO368

## Heritage Listing

Moonee Valley City

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

*What is significant?*

The Clocktower Centre at 750 Mt Alexander Road, Moonee Ponds, comprising the tower of the 1879-80 Essendon and Flemington (Mechanics') Institute, which was extended in 1884-86 in its conversion to the Essendon Town Hall by architects Wilson and Beswicke. The northern part of the building was largely replaced in 1913-14 with a design by GB Leith and Son. A clock was added to the 1880 tower in 1930. A new wing was built at the centre of the Mt Alexander Road frontage in 1940-41. In 1976 the complex was converted to a community

centre.

Following a fire in 1978, the southern comer (of 1914) and the Pascoe Vale Road frontage were demolished and replaced with a concrete building. This was replaced with the present glass and concrete structure, officially relaunched as the Clocktower Centre for arts and culture in 2000.

The following elements are of significance:

- The 1880 Italianate rendered masonry tower with a mansard roof and decorative cast-iron balustrading at the top, as well as the 1930 clocks.

- The 1914 Classical Revival hall at the north end of the site, with decorative detail such as Ionic pilasters, round-arched openings with expressed keystones, cast seashells above first-floor windows, dentilled pediments and cast -cement urns to the parapet.

- The 1941 Moderne (overpainted) red brick central wing, with details such as the brick grilles concealing lighting, horizontal metal railing to the first-floor balcony and flat concrete hood above it, round stays for two flagpoles, and geometric brick lettering on the parapet reading 'TOWN HALL'.

*How is it significant?*

The Clocktower Centre is of historical, social and aesthetic significance to the City of Moonee Valley.

*Why is it significant?*

Historically, the tower is the only surviving tangible evidence of Moonee Valley's only mechanics' institute, of 1879-80, financed by community subscription and designed by eminent architect JJ Clark, designer of Melbourne landmarks including the Treasury Building, the Melbourne Mint, and the Melbourne City Baths. Mechanics' institutes were community organisations intended for the improvement of the cultural, educational and social life of the community. (Criterion A).

Historically, also as the council chamber and offices for the Town (and later City) of Essendon, from 1886 to 1973. Its conversion from a mechanics' institute marks the formation of the Borough of Essendon in 1882, following the secession of Flemington, and the resultant shift of the municipality's centre of gravity northward from Ascot Vale. The successive buildings on this site, all designed by prominent architects of their day, are an expression of the confidence and community spirit of the municipality. (Criterion A)

Socially, as a centre for community life since its inception as a mechanics' institute, and then as the town and city hall, hosting important public meetings and events such as the first mayoral ball in 1889. While the municipal functions moved to a new building in Kellaway Avenue in 1973, the complex has retained its social function as a community centre and performing arts
centre. (Criterion G).

Aesthetically, the clock tower is an important landmark in the municipality, as reflected by the current name of the complex. Also for the demonstration of successive architectural styles including Italianate (1880 clock tower), Classicism (1914 hall), and Moderne (1941 wing). (Criterion E).

## Theme

7. Governing Victorians

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|---|---|
| Heritage Study/Consultant | Moonee Valley - Moonee Valley Heritage Overlay Places Review, David Helms Heritage Planning, 2012; |
| Other Names | Former Essendon Town Hall,   Essendon and Flemington Institute, |
| Hermes Number | 191760 |

## Physical Description 1

The Clocktower Centre, at 750 Mt Alexander Road, Moonee Ponds, is situated at the acute angle intersection of Mt Alexander and Pascoe Vale roads, with the facade to Mt Alexander Road. It was built in a number of phases, over a period of 100 years, which is legible from the exterior. The majority of the complex has no setback from the road, with the exception of a modern wing at the south end, which is set behind the line of the remnant 1880 clock tower, ensuring its prominence.

From south to north, the following phases are seen on Mt Alexander Road: a glazed wing at the comer of the year 2000; set in front of it is the clock tower of 1880; at the north end of the modern wing is a 1941 brick Moderne facade (behind which is a c1914 gabled hip roof, but it is concealed); and at the north end is the 1914 Town Hall. They will be described in the order of their construction.

The clock tower is the only remnant of the 1880 mechanics' institute, which was converted to the Essendon Town Hall. It is roughly three storeys high, finished in cement render, with a mansard roof. Decorative expression is well mannered Italianate, with round-arched windows with keystones, moulded stringcourses, and cornices above the first floor and below the roof. The windows at the top (second) floor level are inset within a panel with chamfered edges. The keystones at the first floor level have an incised floral decoration, which is typical of the period (though usually less restrained). The mansard roof sits above a rendered parapet, and has a highly decorative wrought-iron balustrade and flagpole struts at the top. Clock faces were installed on the four faces of the roof in 1930. The top (second) floor retains double-hung sashes in its narrow paired windows. The first-floor window of the west elevation and an arched doorway below have been replaced with single fixed panes. Openings on the north and south sides of the first and ground floors are blind arches.

The 1914 Town Hall has a formal, Classical Revival facade, with a large red-brick hall behind. Like the clock tower, the facade is finished and detailed in cement render. It is two storeys in height, with the four central bays of the first floor inset, leaving the two end bays expressed as 'towers'.

The ground floor sits on a low rock-faced basalt plinth. It is divided into six bays with Ionic-order pilasters, with four arched windows set between pairs of arched doors at either end. The windows are inset in shallow arched openings flanked by simple pilasters and have a keystone at the top (as do the doors).

The two storeys are divided by a simple moulded cornice and a solid balustrade. Window bays are divided by simple panelled pilasters. The windows to the two end 'towers' are round-headed, double-hung sashes. Those inset behind the terrace are rectangular with a blind arch above, inset with a cast shell ornament. The building terminates with a tall parapet, above a dentilled cornice. There are closed, dentilled pediments to the end 'towers' and over the two central bays (with the raised words 'Town Hall'). The parapet is decorative with cast-cement urns above each pilaster.

Alterations to the facade include the replacement of double-hung sashes to the eight central windows (ground and first floor). A modern box - related to the theatre inside - projects intrusively just behind the central parapet.

The north elevation of the 1914 Town Hall is secondary in nature. It is constructed of red bricks with engaged buttressing and cement-render dressings. Round-arched windows have all been in-filled with brick. Behind it is a large, prefabricated concrete fly tower.

The 1941 Modeme Town Hall, at the middle of the complex, is a small structure, two storeys in height, constructed of brick (overpainted). It is expressed as a frame, with brick piers on either side supporting a parapet, surrounding large glazed openings at the ground and first floor levels. While small and simple, it has a number of attractive details typical of the style. These include the grilles of horizontal bricks concealing light fixtures at ground-floor level, a first-floor balcony stretching across the facade with a railing of fine horizontal lines, a shallow concrete hood above the first floor with circular holders for a flagpole at either end, 'speed stripes' of raised brick at the top of the parapet, and the words 'Town Hall' in raised bricks at the centre of the parapet.

All of the doors and glazing to this building are recent in date, and the facebrick has been overpainted.

The 2000 works include a largely glazed two-storey wing set behind the clock tower, a prefabricated-concrete facade to Pascoe Vale Road, and an unarticulated prefab concrete wall comprising the rear half of the north elevation.

*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/*