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Horsham Historical Society and Legacy Rooms

Former Public Library (1937), Mechanics Institute (1909)

33 Pynsent Street, Horsham

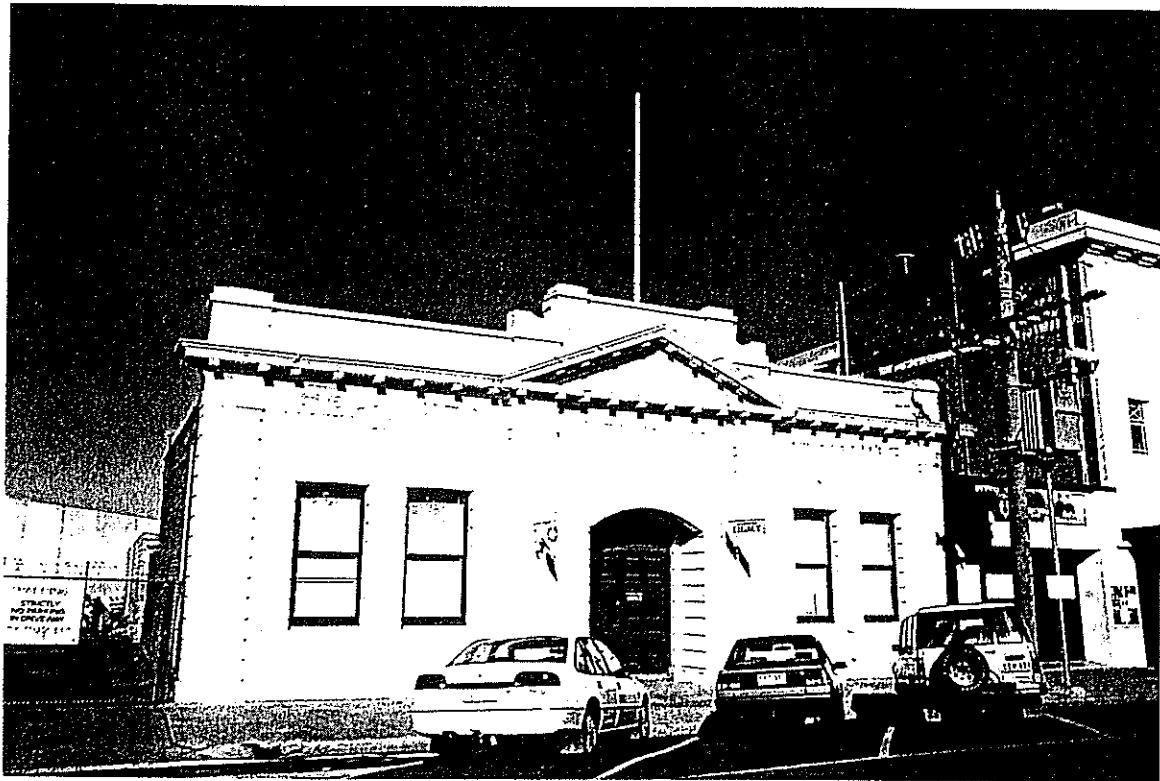


Photo: December 1997

Existing Registrations:

Victorian Heritage Register: nil

National Estate Register: nil

National Trust Register: nil 1st Site Cnr Firebrace & Wilson Sts

*SEE IF THE WALKER COULD SPEAK BOOK
BY PAM BARTLE WINTER 2000.*

→ 1860's.

History: A Mechanics Institute was established in Horsham in 1872. It had two temporary premises before acquiring a site in Firebrace Street for a purpose built institute. The Parish plan for the Town of Horsham identifies the site as lot 10 of Section 3 on the west side of Firebrace Street between Pynsent and Splatt Streets. It had an area of two perches and became the property of the Trustees of the Mechanics Institute on the 9 February 1874.

Between 1872 and 1874, Richard Spry erected a wood building which became the centre of learning and entertainment for the people of the Horsham district. Fire destroyed the building in 1908. It had become inadequate for the needs of the Institute and the fire inadvertently provided impetus to move to a new site to erect a larger, more suitable building.

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The new site was on the south side of Pynsent Street between Firebrace and Urquhart Streets; originally bought from the Crown by George Langlands. In 1908-9, the Institute paid 359 pounds for part lot 6 of Section 9.

At an extraordinary meeting held in the Borough Offices on 22 March 1909, it was decided to appoint the Ballarat based architectural firm of Clegg and Miller to design the new premises. On the 14 May 1909, from twelve tenders received, the committee appointed the contractor D. Armour of Melbourne whose quoted price was 1987 pounds for the new brick building. A billiard room was included. A photo in the Horsham Centenary Booklet 1950 shows the building complete with its verandah.

From its new premises the Institute continued its role in the education and entertainment of the citizens of Horsham. Local and travelling artists enthralled audiences. The most long lasting legacy however was its library services. In 1937, the Institute became the Horsham Public Library and the seeds were sown for a library free to all.

In 1949, the Council took over the library. The building became Council property "with the proviso that it be used for education, cultural, community, artistic and municipal purposes". The library moved in 1968. The following year, the billiard room was demolished. New venues and life style changes meant the hall was not sought so much. Rentals dropped and the Institute as it had been known, died. It had been used variously as a library, dance-class centre, concert hall, cinema and First World War troop-comfort centre. The building has subsequently come alive again as the headquarters for Legacy and the Horsham Historical Society.

Description: A stylistically conservative Edwardian Classical Revival public building, retaining its principal front rooms and having a symmetrical façade with central entry emphasized by pilasters and a surmounting pediment. The whole of the façade is rusticated and the words "Mechanics Institute Estab'd 1872" are in cast cement in the frieze.

Integrity: Medium, verandah removed, billiard room, demolished. **Condition:** Sound

Comparative examples: Mechanics Institute buildings erected between 1905 and 1915 include Korong (1905), Lakes Entrance (1907), Lascelles (1914), Longford (1911), Mead (1912), Meerlieu (1910), Meredith (1905), Middle Bridge (1906), Mildura (1908), Milford (1907), Ryton (1906), Seville (1912), Silvan (1906), Strezleckie (1906), Sunshine (1908), Toora Tin Mines (1907), Tyrendarra (1914), Whorouly (1907), Acheron (1913), Bayles (1906), Bessiebelle (1909), Binginwarri (1907), Budgerree (1910), Bullarto (1905), Buln Buln (1907), Campbell's Forest (1910), and Dunrobin (1915).

Significance: The Horsham Mechanics Institute building of 33 Pynsent Street is representative of the role of the Mechanics Institute movement in Horsham and has cultural value in this respect (Criteria A and G). It is a rare surviving early public building in the City, post dating the surviving Masonic Lodge of 1885 and pre-dating the

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RSSILA building of 1921 (Criterion B). It forms a group within the Central Area historic precinct with the Horsham Theatre of 1926 and W.B.Motors of 1925.

References: Horsham Centenary Souvenir Booklet 1950, p.58.

Borough of Horsham Rate Book: 1925-6, p.26.

Brian Brooke and Alan Finch, A Story of Horsham, A Municipal Century,
City of Horsham, 1982, pp.141, 147, 180, 190.

Town of Horsham, Parish Plan, Department of Lands and Survey,
28.2.1928.

Horsham Sewerage Plan no. 132, c.1927, amended June 1948.

Data sheet prepared by Andrew Ward 2/98