



Moreland City Council

## Victorian Heritage Database place details - 13/2/2012

### Mechanics' Institute

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**Location:**

270 Sydney Road, Brunswick, Moreland City

**Heritage Overlay Number:** HO154

**Listing Authority:** HO

**Extent of Registration:**

**Statement of Significance:**

Brunswick Mechanics' Institute is of local historical and architectural significance. It is one of the earliest surviving, and reasonably intact, Mechanics' Institutes built in Victoria in the 19th century. Brunswick Mechanics' Institute is distinguished by its compact plan and building form, with its unusual juxtaposition of front room with a transverse main hall. It is also unusual for its simple yet classically inspired architectural treatment and roof form. The Institute is an integral element of this part of Sydney Road, which includes many civic and church buildings. The building also derives significance from its role as the a community focus for Brunswick.

**History**

A Mechanics' Institute to serve Brunswick was first mooted in 1861 with the planning of a series of lectures by 'first rate literary men'. The object, apart from imparting valuable knowledge, was to form the nucleus of a building fund for a suitable building. The council offered a grant of £99 conditional on a further sum being raised by public subscription; later that year a committee of 21 men was elected and the municipality divided into sections for the purposes of canvassing support. T J Sumner laid the foundation stone of the present building in 1868. Sumner had offered land for a site in 1861 and it is assumed his offer was accepted. The erection of the Mechanics' Institute was noticed in the London journal Builder in 1870. They reported In Brunswick, a Mechanics' institute has been erected and opened. The designs and plans for the building were prepared by Messrs. Kelly and Beswick, architects. The estimated cost is about £2000. At present, the committees have been restricted to building the concert-hall, which externally does not present a striking appearance. The hall is 60 ft [18m] by 30 ft [9m] and 22 ft [6.5m] high, with a capacious platform, a coved ceiling rising from a moulded cornice, with ornamental sunlights, and ventilation obtained by Watson's cupola vents. The acoustic qualities are said to be good. Mr B. Crooke is the contractor, and this portion has cost about £7001.

Despite the claim of the Builder of a staged building programme, M Lewis (1988) considers it possible that the entire building was erected in the period c.1868-70.

The Mechanics' Institute housed the Brunswick Free Lending Library from 1926 until March 1976, ending 108 years of provision of a library service. when it moved to the small hall of the Town Hall complex on Sydney Road. The building had been threatened with demolition to make way for a new library building on the site, but after the library's move to the small hall, the Institute was renovated in 1978 and now houses community arts

facilities, including a performance space in the hall and an art gallery.(1)

The building is now one of the earliest surviving Institute buildings and is contemporary with such institutional buildings as Ballarat (hall and offices 1860; facade 1869) and Williamstown (1859, extended 1869 and 1874).

(1) H Penrose (ed.), BrunswickOne History, Many Voices, South Melbourne 1994, pp. 83-87.

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#### References

Builder, London, 13 August 1870.

Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works, Detail plan October 1904.

F G Miles. Jubilee History

#### Description

The Brunswick Mechanic's Institute is a single storey rendered brick building with a gabled slate roof. The west (front) and south facades are symmetrical, each with ionic pilasters and four arched windows with simple moulded dressings. A central pediment sits above the arched highlighted entrance, which has nail-head and acanthus leaf mouldings above the opening. Windows are timber-framed double-hung sashes. Local bricks were used in the construction.

In 1905 some renovation works (details unknown) were undertaken and in 1910 a new Wunderlich pressed metal ceiling was installed in the hall. In 1926, the original bichrome brickwork was rendered, the raised lettering 'Mechanic's Institute' [sic] and '1926' added at architrave level, the cast iron ridge cresting removed and the original recessed entry infilled. Recent changes have included some minor internal partitioning, installation of false ceilings and bricking up of fire places. The original landscaping included several Moreton Bay Fig trees, which were removed in 1924

Key Architectural Elements: symmetrical Classical Revival facades, identical on west and south facades setback from Sydney Road and provision of landscaped forecourt unusual

Conservation Guidelines: remove brick steel handrails and paved ramps and steps to front door and replace with sympathetic design

Principal Historic Themes: association with local community groups

Heritage Study	1990 - Moreland - Keeping Brunswick's heritage: A Report on the Review of the Brunswick Conservation Study, 1999 - Moreland - City of Moreland Heritage Review
Year Construction Started	1868
Architect / Designer	Kelly & Beswick
Architectural Style	
Heritage Act Categories	
Municipality	MORELAND CITY
Other names	
History	