



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 6.1 Forming associations, libraries and institutes for se education
- 8.5.4 Pursuing common leisure interests
- 8.10 Pursuing excellence in the arts and sciences

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 405 Sport, recreation and entertainment
- 407 Cultural activities

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

Old Mill Theatre is a modest but pleasing example of the Federation Free Classical style, exhibiting informal but elegant massing, simplified classical ornamentation, and distinctive parapeted gables with skew corbels on three elevations. (Criterion 1.1)

Old Mill Theatre is set within attractive landscaped grounds, which combine with the building to contribute to a distinct and significant streetscape along Mends Street. (Criterion 1.3)

Old Mill Theatre forms an important component of the South Perth Historic Village Precinct, also comprising the Perth Zoological Gardens (1898), Windsor Park (1886), the Old Council Offices (1904), the Windsor Hotel (1898), the Chemists Shop, the Stidworthy Residence (fmr) (1900-02), the South Perth Post Office (1900), and the South Perth Bowling Club. (Criterion 1.4)

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from R. Apperly, R. Irving, and P. Reynolds, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1989.

For consistency, all references to garden and landscape types and styles are taken from J. Ramsay, *Parks, Gardens and Special Trees: A Classification and Assessment Method for the Register of the National Estate*, AGPS, Canberra, 1991, with additional reference to O. Richards, *Theoretical Framework for Designed Landscapes in WA*, unpublished report, 1997.

11. 2. HISTORIC VALUE

Old Mill Theatre is representative of the development of Mechanics' Institutes in Western Australia from the mid-nineteenth century. (Criterion 2.2)

Old Mill Theatre forms an important component of a South Perth commercial, entertainment and cultural precinct, which also includes the Perth Zoological Gardens (1898), the Old Council Offices (1904), the Windsor Hotel (1898), the Chemists Shop, the South Perth Post Office (1900), and the South Perth Bowling Club. As such, the place demonstrates the development of the South Perth community. (Criterion 2.2)

Old Mill Theatre is integrally connected with the development of private (non-Government, non-Catholic) education in South Perth from 1901 to 1948. (Criterion 2.2)

Old Mill Theatre is associated with the way of life and attitudes of middle class residents of the South Perth area, especially during the time the Hall was occupied by private schools. (Criterion 2.2)

Old Mill Theatre is associated with people significant in the history of South Perth (and Western Australia) including May Gibbs, internationally renowned illustrator and author; Henry Prockter, architect; Thelma Jean 'Jill' Hargrave, educationalist; and Constance Ord, theatre director. (Criterion 2.3)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Old Mill Theatre is highly valued by the local community for its use as an amateur theatre from c.1946 to the present (2004). (Criterion 4.1)

Old Mill Theatre contributes to the community's sense of place through its prominent location in the commercial, entertainment and cultural centre of South Perth. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Old Mill Theatre is a rare extant example of a former Mechanics' Institute that also combined the secondary function of Road Board Offices in its design. (Criterion 5.1)

Old Mill Theatre has rarity value as a former Mechanics' Institute in Western Australia that has continued to play a key role in the cultural and educational life of the local community. (Criterion 5.2)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Old Mill Theatre is representative of the Federation Free Classical style of architecture, popular in Western Australia during the prosperity of the 1890s and early 1900s. (Criterion 6.1)

Old Mill Theatre is representative of the work of the architect, Henry James Prockter, in the Federation Free Classical style, of which the place is a modest example. (Criterion 6.1)

Old Mill Theatre is representative of the Mechanics' Institute ethos, which was concerned with promoting cultural development and is expressed here through the continuous use of the place for theatre and entertainment. (Criterion 6.2)

12.3 CONDITION

Old Mill Theatre is generally in good condition. The interior spaces, particularly the hall and stage, show considerable wear, consistent with their ongoing use. The place has been subject to a number of alterations, additions and renovations and has generally been well maintained.

12.4 INTEGRITY

Old Mill Theatre has a high level of integrity, maintaining ongoing social and community functions. The place has been used as a hall, a meeting space, offices, a theatre, and a school.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

Old Mill Theatre has undergone both internal and external alterations and additions and has a moderate level of authenticity. Externally, the original tuck-pointed brickwork with sand finished rendered details has been painted, and the galvanized corrugated iron roof has been replaced with Colourbond zincalume. Structures have been added to the rear (east) of the building, a weatherboard lean-to housing the kitchen, an extension to the lean-to housing an office and store, and a double volume brick addition used for storage. Fenestrations have been bricked in along the south and east walls. Internally, a number of alterations have dramatically changed the original appearance of the place, most notably the solid timber paneling that has been applied to walls in the Foyer and Constance Ord Lounge. Other internal changes include the introduction of raked seating (which has now been removed), the paneling of the ceilings, the installation of new lighting and ceiling fans, and the laying of carpet throughout most of the rooms.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Wayne Moredoundt, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Palassis Architects.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Old Mill Theatre is a simple Federation Free Classical style rendered brick and iron building, in Mends Street, South Perth, constructed in 1899 as the South Perth Mechanics' Institute Hall. It was known as South Perth Mechanics' Institute Hall until 1913. Other uses for the place include South Perth Road Board offices (1899 –1904), school (1901- c1940), and theatre (c1946 – 2004).

The growth of South Perth was slow until the 1880s, by which time access to Perth was improved with the introduction of ferry services and construction of bridges across the Swan and Canning Rivers. The discovery of gold in Western Australia from 1885 led to an increase in population, with land facing Perth Water progressively sub-divided between 1886 and 1904. It was during this period that much of the infrastructure of South Perth was developed.¹

After the mid-1890s, the sale of South Perth suburban land was influenced by speculative investors. Some of the larger sections were bought for the purpose of quick sub-division and sale to take advantage of rising prosperity and the prospect of improved ferry services, or a rail link, to Perth. In 1892, the South Perth Roads Board District was formed, and, in 1902, the suburb became a municipality. By the turn-of-the-century there were four jetties at South Perth, the Zoological Gardens had opened (in 1898), and a school and postal facilities were established.²

What is now known as *Old Mill Theatre* was originally built as a Mechanics' Institute Hall in 1899. The site in Mends Street was well-located for public access, with the area around the intersection of Mends Street and Mill Point Road developing from that time as the commercial and entertainment centre of the South Perth district. This development was largely due to easy access to ferry transport to the City from the Mends Street Jetty.³

Mechanics' Institutes originated in Scotland in the early 1800s, as a means of providing instruction for tradesmen, or 'mechanics', who may have received little or no formal education. By 1826, a similar institution had been established in London, and, by the 1850s, there were six hundred Institutes throughout England. Institutes were founded on the ideal of 'improving' the working classes, with organizational positions commonly occupied by members of the bourgeoisie.⁴

¹ Cecil Florey, *Peninsula City: A Social History of South Perth, Western Australia*, City of South Perth, 1995, pp. 40-72.

² F.K. Crowley, *The History of South Perth*, Rigby, Perth, 1962, pp. 42-54.

³ Crowley, *The History of South Perth*, pp. 42-54

⁴ M.J. Bourke, *On the Swan: A History of the Swan District, Western Australia*, UWA Press, 1987, p. 207.

Mechanics' Institutes, or Working Men's Associations, were also established in Western Australia during the nineteenth century as a means of bringing education and 'rational amusement' to the working classes during their free time. The Swan River Mechanics' Institute, which was the first such organization in Western Australia, was founded in 1852, while the Fremantle Working Men's Association and the Albany Mechanics' Institutes were opened soon after. Institutes were also established in Guildford (1862), Geraldton and Northam (1864), Toodyay (1866), and York (1868).⁵

The idea of 'improving' the working classes is explicit in the set of rules drawn up for the Swan River Mechanics' Institute in 1851:

The chief object of this Institute is to benefit the mechanics and young men of the Colony, by affording them an unobjectionable mode of recreation and improvement ... The plan of the Institute shall embrace the following mode of operation, viz.:- weekly meetings, at which to discuss some subject of a literary, scientific or other useful character- carefully excluding all questions of controversial theology, party politics or of an immoral tendency; the formation of a museum, and of a library and reading room to be open to all members and subscribers to the Institute, the formation of classes for mutual instruction in useful branches of knowledge, and the delivery of lectures on interesting and useful subjects.⁶

Although membership was, in principle, open to all men who could afford the membership or subscription fee, a 'character' test was applied to potential members:

... no question of party, religion, nation or residence shall be allowed to militate against the nomination of any [male] person proposed for membership, provided that no person shall be admitted who shall be generally known to be of moral character.⁷

That the South Perth Mechanics' Institute was also established to 'improve' the working classes is apparent from the list of Trustees of the organization. Prominent among the names were successful 'non-conformist' settlers of English origin; Arthur Douglas and Ernest C. Shenton were Wesleyan Methodists, and J.D. Manning was an English Baptist. The other Trustees were George E. Rogers and Henry James Prockter.⁸

In February of 1899, local architect and Institute Trustee Henry Prockter called for tenders to construct the South Perth Mechanics' Institute Hall, as well as an attached office for the South Perth Road Board.⁹ Prockter had arrived in Western Australia from Victoria in 1896, and between then and 1904, carried out eighty-two building projects in Perth, including eleven in South Perth. Buildings that he designed in South Perth included St Mary's Church (1898) and a Shelter Shed on the Mends Street Jetty (1901). Buildings designed by Prockter in other parts of the State included the North

⁵ HCWA Assessment Documentation for *Mechanics' Institute, Guildford*. p. 3.

⁶ Research Note #422, Battye Library.

⁷ Research Note #422, Battye Library.

⁸ CSO File 1110/99, SRO, cited in Florey, *Peninsula City*, p. 95.

⁹ Florey, *Peninsula City*, p. 96.

Perth Town Hall (1902), Northam Municipal Chambers (1902), and the Cornwall Hotel, Narrogin (1904).¹⁰

On 23 May 1899, a meeting of the members of the Institute was held at the Windsor Hotel, to approve borrowing against the land that the Hall was to be built on, and which the Institute owned, in order to finance the building of the premises, which were, in fact, almost completed. A few weeks later, the Trustees advised the Colonial Under-Secretary that 500 pounds had already been raised by mortgaging the property to local businessman and entrepreneur, Joseph Charles, and that the building was already completed, with the builder awaiting payment.¹¹ Charles, who had arrived in Western Australia from New South Wales in 1890, had made money by developing land for housing in Subiaco and South Perth. He also started a ferry service between Perth and South Perth in 1897, and launched the lucrative W.A. Tattersalls in 1898.¹²

The completed Hall was opened by Sir John Forrest on 7 August 1899. According to an account of the opening night in the *West Australian*, also present at the 'substantially-built hall, with offices of neat design' were the Chairman of the Institute, R.S. Haynes, M.L.C.; Norman K. Ewing, K.C. (M.L.A. for Swan 1897-1901); Ernest C. Shenton; and the Chairman of the South Perth Road Board, John D. Manning (Junior). Haynes, in asking Forrest to declare the Hall open, said that:

South Perth had been the first Roads Board District in the whole colony to tax itself to make new roads, and it was the first district to build such a fine hall as they had. Without going cap in hand to the Government for assistance. They had not received a single sixpence from the Government. Whatever money had been wanted had been generously advanced by Mr Charles.¹³

The Hall was used for concerts, as well as providing a library and billiards parlour. Immediately after the official opening of the Hall, a 'high class concert' was held, with solo performances contributed by May Gibbs and S.W. Copely, followed by a comic play, 'To Oblige Benson'.¹⁴ Two weeks later, another evening of 'musical and dramatic entertainment' was held in the Hall. A small orchestra led by Mr H. Pether gave 'several bright selections', May Gibbs sang 'For All Eternity', Copely sang 'Big Ben', and actors again performed 'To Oblige Benson'.¹⁵

The front offices of the Mechanics' Institute Hall provided a base for the South Perth Road Board, who rented the space. After the first meeting of the newly-formed South Perth Municipal Council on 13 May 1902, the Trustees

¹⁰ Born at Stoke Newington (U.K.) in 1863; emigrated to Tasmania in 1884; moved to Melbourne soon afterwards. Practiced as an architect in Melbourne from 1886 to 1896. Lived at 6 Hardey Street, South Perth, until 1909, when he returned to England for a few years. Afterwards, came back to Western Australia and resided at Kalamunda. From 'Architectural Biography, 1890-1915', in Ian Kelly, 'The Development of Housing in Perth (1890-1915)', M.A. Thesis, U.W.A., 1991.

¹¹ Florey, *Peninsula City*, p. 96.

¹² Later, Charles was elected to Perth City Council (in 1900), and became the first Mayor of South Perth in 1902. Florey, *Peninsula City*, pp. 98-99.

¹³ *West Australia*, 8 August 1899.

¹⁴ *West Australia*, 8 August 1899.

¹⁵ *West Australia*, 22 August 1899.

of the Institute were approached to provide additional rental space for an office and a board room for the use of the Council. In August 1903, the Council attempted to purchase the Hall, taking over the mortgage of 550 pounds from the Institute, while allowing the Library Committee the continued use of their existing reading room. However, the Trustees of the Institute rejected this proposal.¹⁶ On 12 April 1904, the Council tried to have the Billiards Room in the Institute closed on the nights of Council meetings, due to the noise created by the players. After this request was rejected, the Council requested the Institute Trustees to reconsider the issue. Again the Council was unsuccessful. Because of this continuing problem, in early 1904, the Council resolved to move out of the Mechanics' Institute completely, into the already planned offices next door.¹⁷

On 22 September 1903 Council resolved to 'build offices at once at a cost not exceeding 200 pounds'. This decision was for offices only, with meetings continuing to be held at the Mechanics' Institute Hall. Two weeks later, the Council resolved to proceed with planning for this building. On 2 November 1903, plans of the site were submitted by the Council Surveyor. Subsequently, in light of the ongoing problem with billiard players in the Institute Hall, Council commissioned a re-planning of its proposed offices to include a council chamber.¹⁸ Duncan Henry Inverarity, who was also the Council Surveyor, was engaged as architect for the project, and within three weeks plans had been drawn, and tenders called and received.¹⁹ The foundation stone for the new Council offices was laid on 9 June 1904, with the first Council meeting held in the completed building on 17 November of the same year.²⁰

The Mechanics' Institute Hall was the venue of a number of private schools for the children of middle class South Perth families. The first school that operated from the Hall, less than two years after opening as a Mechanics' Institute, was Miss Burnet's School, from 1901 to 1903. The next establishment in the Hall was Miss Beatrice 'Trixie' Orchard's School, 'Neeamara', which operated from 1904 until 1912. Trestle tables and chairs were set up on the stage area for the infants' classes under Miss 'Bunny' Clifton, the middle standards were in the main hall with Miss Orchard, while the older children went to the back room with Miss Pearly Atkins.²¹

Although the Mechanics' Institute received rental income from Trixie Orchard's school, by 1908 the Institute was in decline. At the beginning of that year, the Trustees of the Institute asked for, and received, from the Council 50 pounds to help with their financial difficulties. On 25 November 1912, the Annual Meeting of Ratepayers raised the possibility of Council taking over the Mechanics' Hall. After endorsement by ratepayers at a Special Meeting on 9 April 1913, a month later Council resolved to raise a

¹⁶ Florey, *Peninsula City*, pp. 109-110.

¹⁷ Florey, *Peninsula City*, pp. 110-111.

¹⁸ Florey, *Peninsula City*, pp. 110-111.

¹⁹ Florey, *Peninsula City*, pp. 110-111.

²⁰ *Morning Herald*, 10 June 1904; Florey, *Peninsula City*, pp. 112-113.

²¹ Susan Clarke, *Penrhos: Her Heritage*, Perth, 1988, p. 12.

loan of 1,000 pounds for the purchase of the Hall and the Institute's other assets. After acquiring the Hall soon afterwards, the Council renamed the building the Mends Street Hall on 18 December 1913, and continued to rent the Hall for educational use. On 2 June 1914, Council resolved to renovate the Hall, to a cost of 50 pounds. On 8 October 1914, the South Perth Municipal Council offered the books and shelves from the Institute to the South Perth Young Men's Association for 10 pounds.²²

From 1913 until 1918, Miss A.E. Binsted's 'South Perth High School' operated from the Hall. Miss Binstead was an English woman, with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Oxford, who had come to Australia as Governess to the Lee-Steere family. In 1912, she had begun a school in the home of Miss Kitty Connors, with another teacher, Miss Leila Du Boulay. After some of the children from Miss Orchard's school were sent to the new school run by Miss Binsted, the former school was no longer economically viable. As a consequence, Miss Binsted took over operation of the school in the Institute Hall.²³

It was sometime during 1918, that a group of local parents, who for reasons now unknown were unhappy with Miss Binsted's management of the South Perth High School, established a rival school in St Mary's Hall. Miss Agnes Cross, the retired headmistress of Tintern School, in Victoria, was brought to South Perth, to set up the new school. Within a short time, most of the Miss Binsted's students had gone across to Miss Cross's establishment. Miss Binsted moved out of the Institute Hall, which was now taken over by Miss Cross. Miss Binsted taught for a year in a private home in the area, after which she returned to England.²⁴

South Perth High School was renamed Raith Girls' Grammar School, although boys also attended the school.²⁵ Miss Cross' sister, Pearl, who was in charge of boarders at Cowandilla School, West Perth (later St Mary's School), joined Raith as Head of a new boarding school. The Boarding House was first established in the home of the Gibbs family, in Harvest Terrace, who were, at the time, in England. Later, the boarders lived in Professor Walter Murdoch's house in Mill Point Road, while Murdoch was overseas. Under Miss Cross, the students were encouraged in an attitude of *noblesse oblige*, helping others less 'fortunate' than themselves. By 1922, Agnes Cross, now quite elderly, wanted to return to Melbourne, to help care for two of her sisters who were in ill health. Consequently she resigned as principal of Raith.²⁶

From 1923 until 1928, Raith Girls' Grammar School was funded by the Church of England, and underwent a change of name to Raith Church of England Girls' Grammar School. The school, now with eighty pupils, four teachers, and three boarders, was managed by Miss Marjorie Broadhurst. Miss Broadhurst, from Melbourne, had been trained in Britain in the Froebel

²² Florey, *Peninsula City*, pp. 121-122.

²³ Clarke, *Penrhos: Her Heritage*, pp. 14-15.

²⁴ Clarke, *Penrhos: Her Heritage*, p. 16.

²⁵ As can be seen in a photograph of the student body in, Clarke, *Penrhos: Her Heritage*, p. 17.

²⁶ Clarke, *Penrhos: Her Heritage*, pp. 16-19.

method of teaching, which encourage children to learn through drawing, painting, claywork, sewing, dancing and music. Due to disagreement between Miss Broadhurst and the School Board, the former decided after a year to return to her previous school, Merton Hall in Melbourne.²⁷

The new head of Raith was Miss Hetherington, an older Scottish woman, who had taught north of the river. After a year, Miss Hetherington was forced to resign due to ill-health. From the beginning of 1926, Raith was headed by Miss J.S. Parker, a young teacher from York, who had taught at Raith at the time of Miss Cross. At the end of 1928, the Church of England transferred their support from Raith to the Girls' High School (now St Hilda's). As a result of this action, Miss Parker resigned from Raith.²⁸

Between 1929 and 1933, the again renamed Raith Girls' Grammar School was once more run by Miss Hetherington. The older girls had left by this time, for Perth College, St Mary's and St Hilda's, leaving only the younger children (which still included boys) to be taught. Other teachers at this time included Miss Catherine King and Miss McLeod. One day, shortly after the start of the 1934 school year, children arrived to find the school unattended. The vacated Hall was taken over a short time later, by Miss Thelma Jane 'Jill' Hargraves, herself a former pupil of the school, during the time of Miss Binsted.²⁹

Between 1934 and 1935, Raith School was directed by Miss Jill Hargrave, who between 1926 and 1933 had operated St Chad's kindergarten school, for children to the age of eight, from her South Perth home. She had begun her teacher training at Kindergarten Training College in 1923, receiving instruction in the Froebel and Montessori methods and in administration. Initially, she commenced her school with eight pupils, ranging in age from two and a half years to eight, operating on the side verandah of her family's house at 158 Mill Point Road. By 1932, Miss Hargrave's kindergarten had been inspected, and accredited as an 'efficient' school. It was, however, crowded, with 23 children on the verandah space, with more arriving after the demise of Raith. After receiving permission from the South Perth Road Board, Miss Hargraves relocated to the Mends Street Hall.³⁰

From 1935, Raith Grammar School became known as St Ann's Kindergarten and Junior School and operated under Miss Hargrave's direction.³¹ The school was registered as a kindergarten and a sub-primary, and an extra teacher was employed. However, as Miss Hargrave felt constrained by the lack of opportunity for expansion at the Mends Street Hall - and by having to pack away the school paraphernalia to make way for the Hall's various weekend functions- she sought land to establish a larger school.³²

²⁷ Clarke, *Penrhos: Her Heritage*, p. 20.

²⁸ Clarke, *Penrhos: Her Heritage*, pp. 20-22.

²⁹ Clarke, *Penrhos: Her Heritage*, p. 24.

³⁰ Clarke, *Penrhos: Her Heritage*, p. 24.

³¹ Florey, *Peninsula City*, p. 113.

³² Clarke, *Penrhos: Her Heritage*, p. 25.

Miss Hargrave's brother, Jack Hargrave, an architect, drew up plans and specifications for a new school on land acquired at 13-15 Angelo Street, South Perth. At the end of 1940, St Anne's College was established in the new premises. In 1951, because of his sister's need to care for their sick mother, John Hargraves offered the school for sale, for the sum of 12,000 pounds, without furnishings and equipment. The school by this time had 100 pupils. Both the Anglican Church and Methodist Ladies' College (MLC), Claremont, were approached with the sale offer and, after the refusal of the former party, the latter agreed to the deal. From the beginning of the 1952 school year, the former St Ann's College was run by MLC, and the school's name was changed to Penrhos (from the name of a school in Wales) College.³³

On 7 March 1946, in the Mends Street Hall, a public meeting was held by the newly-created South Perth Community Centre Association to organize musical performances in South Perth. As a result of this meeting, the South Perth Philharmonic Society was formed. Concerts were held in the Mends Street Hall twice yearly, and rehearsals for the group were also held there. Two years after forming the group disbanded.³⁴ In early 1948, a small group of South Perth residents met together to form a Play Reading Group, under the auspices of the Community Centre Association. After a few meetings of the Group, it was decided to form a legally constituted Club, which came about in May 1948. The first President was Morris Mundy, the Secretary, Geoff Oliver, and the Treasurer, Constance Ord. A few months later, Mrs Ord took over the position of Secretary. She continued with this role until the 1980s, combining this, from 1969, with the duties of Artistic Director and Manager of the *Old Mill Theatre*.³⁵

In October 1948, the newly formed South Perth Dramatic Club held a presentation of One Act Plays in the Mends Street Hall, the use of which it shared with a number of other community groups. Regular productions of One Act Play Seasons continued until 1951, when the Club entered the Western Australian Drama Festival with its first full length production, J.B. Priestley's 'They Came to a City'. The play did well in the Festival, receiving positive reviews, with a best supporting actress prize awarded to a member of the South Perth Club.³⁶

As South Perth developed, and as other halls were built, such as the one in Collins Street, pressure to use the Mends Street Hall by different community groups eased. When the Sandgate Street Civic Centre opened in 1959, Council staff relocated from their Mill Point Road offices, and from the Mends Street Hall. Other activities that shared space in the Hall with the Dramatic Club also relocated to the new Civic Centre.³⁷ At the end of 1963, the Dramatic Club submitted a proposal to Council requesting 'control of the Mends Street Hall for a period of three years at a nominal rent, and to

³³ Maxine Laurie, *Striving for the highest: Penrhos College 1952-2002*, Perth, 2003, pp. 1-3, Clarke, *Penrhos: Her Heritage*, pp. 26-31.

³⁴ Florey, *Peninsula City*, p. 257.

³⁵ History: 'The Old Mill Theatre', compiled by Constance Ord, 17 September 1981.

³⁶ Ord, 'The Old Mill Theatre'.

³⁷ Florey, *Peninsula City*, p. 257.

transform this into a Little Theatre'. In return, the Club was prepared to improve and care for the interior of the building and to provide a venue for anyone interested in live theatre to learn and practice their craft. Council agreed to this proposal provided that:

the YMCA is allowed to continue to use the hall on Saturday mornings, that Church of England services may be continued twice monthly on Sundays, that the hall could still be used for small functions, and that alternative accommodation be arranged for badminton clubs now using the hall.³⁸

Soon afterwards, the South Perth Dramatic Club was renamed the 'Old Mill Theatre', which also became the name of the old Mends Street Hall, where the group rehearsed and performed. The Theatre members assumed responsibility for the interior of the Hall, while the Council paid for the maintenance of the building's fabric, as well as for major work, such as electrical rewiring. From the beginning, profits from plays and other activities were invested back into the Theatre infrastructure, leading to a high standard of technical ability to facilitate performances. Improvements paid for by the Theatre company include fixed seating in raised rows, heating, installation of ceiling fans, and carpeting of the audience space. The foyer and Club Lounge have also been lined with solid wood paneling, fully carpeted, and lit with chandeliers.³⁹

In 1973, the South Perth City Council built an addition to *Old Mill Theatre*, which provided much needed dressing room and storage facilities. The Theatre contributed substantially to the cost of the additions, and also fully equipped the new area. Further renovation was needed after a fire in 1984 caused extensive damage to parts of the Theatre. In 1979, for Western Australia's sesquicentennial, the Old Mill Theatre company staged a special production of Henrietta Drake-Brockman's play, 'Men Without Wives', sponsored by the South Perth City Council. From that time, Council financed one night of a particular season each year, to which it invited Councillors, 'senior citizens', and school students.⁴⁰ In 1989, the City of South Perth honoured Constance Ord with a medal for her contribution to the South Perth community, and especially her work with the Old Mill Theatre from the late 1940s to the 1980s. In the 1990s, *Old Mill Theatre* was used to stage performances of Tom Hungerford's play, 'Stories from Suburban Road', and as sets for the Barron Films children's television series, 'Ship to Shore'.⁴¹

In December 1994, *Old Mill Theatre* was included on the City of South Perth's Municipal Inventory. The Municipal Inventory also recognised *Old Mill Theatre* as part of the South Perth Historic Village Precinct, along with the Perth Zoological Gardens (1898), Windsor Park (1886), the Old Council Offices (1904), the Windsor Hotel (1898), the Chemists Shop, the Stidworthy Residence (fmr) (1900-02), the South Perth Post Office (1900), and the South Perth Bowling Club. In 2004, *Old Mill Theatre* continues to be used for the rehearsal and staging of theatrical productions.

³⁸ *South Perth Community News*, December 1963.

³⁹ Ord, 'The Old Mill Theatre'.

⁴⁰ Ord, 'Old Mill Theatre'.

⁴¹ South Perth Local Studies, Information Sheet: 'The Old Mill Theatre'.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Old Mill Theatre comprises a free-standing single-storey painted brick and iron Federation Free Classical style building, constructed in 1899.

Old Mill Theatre is located on the east side of Mends Street, directly south of Mill Point Road in South Perth. Mends Street runs in north-south direction and forms a connection between the ferry terminus and Labouchere Road. Mill Point Road runs in an east-west direction and is a major arterial road. The site is one of the two small lots adjacent to Windsor Park, Reserve 1022, and is bounded on its northern side by Lot P444, the Old Council Offices (also known as South Perth Heritage House), and on its southern side by Lot 993, the South Perth Bowling Club (including greens). The place is an important component of the South Perth Historic Village Precinct (also on the City of South Perth Municipal Inventory) also comprising Windsor Park (1886), the Perth Zoological Gardens (1898), Windsor Hotel (1898), South Perth Post Office (1900), former Stidworthy Residence (1900-02), Old Council Offices (1904), South Perth Police Station (1908), Chemists Shop, and South Perth Bowling Club.

Old Mill Theatre is set back approximately 7 metres from Mends Street and has a landscaped setting, comprising mature trees, low clipped hedges and gardens, and grassed areas. A paved pathway connects the entry on the north elevation with the public footpath. This path is edged with a low wall and garden beds that separate the place from the adjacent Old Council Offices. The southern boundary is defined by an iron rail fence with brick piers that encircles the South Perth Bowling Club. A bituminized carpark that extends as far north as Mill Point Road is located on the eastern side of the place. A brick and tile public toilet block is located northeast of *Old Mill Theatre*, parallel to the Old Council Offices.

Old Mill Theatre is a free-standing painted brick and iron Federation Free Classical style building, exhibiting informal but elegant massing, simplified classical ornamentation, and distinctive parapeted gables on three elevations. The form of the place comprises a large rectangular hall with a gable roof, terminating in a parapet gable on the north elevation. A secondary wing, also with a gable roof and parapet, extends to the east from the body of the hall, and two projecting parapeted gables flank either side of an entry verandah on the western elevation. There are also two additions to the rear (east) of the place, one of which is constructed in brick to match the original building, the other being a weatherboard lean-to. The brick addition has a parapet gable on its east elevation. All the gable parapets feature skewed corbels and capstones with simple ornamentation, this detailing is reflected in the ornamentation of the rendered masonry chimneys.

Distinct, round-headed arch windows, with stained glass multi-pane top-lights and side-hung casements are positioned in each of the gable parapets on the west elevation. The recessed door opening on the west elevation also has a round-headed arch. The windows on the north elevation are casement windows with stained glass multi-pane top-lights and cambered heads. Smaller stained glass awning windows are located

on the east elevation of the secondary (eastern) wing. All the windows have projecting rendered sills, weathered outwards.

Primary entry to the place is via the two doors on north elevation, the easternmost door opens into the Foyer, while the other door opens directly into the Hall. The doors are timber with stained glass multi-pane top-lights, and fixed timber-framed awnings overhead. Another three doors are located at the verandah on the west elevation. The verandah has a concrete floor and a timber verandah beam supported by ornate timber brackets. Four paneled timber doors to each end of the verandah provide access to the Props room and the Green Room, while the main entry door, recessed into the west wall, behind a brick arch, opens into a small Lobby. Both the Lobby and the Foyer connect to the main Hall and Stage area. The Lobby has a timber floor and rendered masonry walls with solid timber paneling to approximately 2100mm. A timber stepladder is located opposite the double doors, providing makeshift access to the raised stage. The Props room is located north of the Lobby, and has a vinyl floor and rendered masonry walls. A masonry fireplace with a painted timber mantle is located on the eastern wall, directly opposite the large round-headed arch window. An original six-panel timber door is located in the southwest corner of the room, opening onto the western verandah. A six-panel timber door (recent) opens into the Lobby, and a six-panel timber double door (also recent) opens into the Hall. The Props room is currently used for storage.

Opposite the Props room, and also accessible from the Lobby, is the Green Room. The Green Room has carpet floors, and rendered masonry walls with plaster architraves along the north and south walls, used as a point of attachment for clothes' hooks. The Green Room has a masonry fireplace located opposite the round-headed arch window. A timber door is located alongside the fireplace, providing access to the stage. A timber stepladder is located under the door to accommodate the change in level between the Green Room and the Stage.

The Stage is of timber construction and is located at the southern end of the main Hall, raised approximately 900mm above the finished floor level of the Hall. Two openings are located on the east wall of the Stage, although only the southernmost door is operable, opening into a Store. The other door opens to the outside and is visible on the east elevation. The Store has timber floors and rendered masonry walls and is split over two levels, with the lower level resembling a basement. Two sets of stairs accommodate the changing floor levels.

The Hall has timber flooring with areas of carpet at its northern end, rendered masonry walls with solid timber paneling to sill height, and timber lined ceilings with exposed timber trusses. Stage lighting and ceiling fans are suspended from the trusses, above the Stage and along the length of the Hall. A timber bio box is located on the far north wall of the Hall, perched above the double doors and supported by two timber columns and two wall brackets. A narrow ladder provides access to the bio box from the Hall. An original timber six-panel door is located in the far northeast corner of the Hall and opens into the Foyer.

The Foyer has carpet flooring, and rendered masonry walls with exposed structural buttresses (associated with the outer wall of the Hall) located along its west wall. The walls feature solid timber paneling (recent) to approximately 2100mm. The east wall of the Foyer is a 2400mm high timber stud wall with timber double doors opening into the Constance Ord Lounge. The Foyer ceiling is raked and timber lined, and extends into the Constance Ord Lounge. The Lounge also has carpet floors, and rendered masonry walls with solid timber paneling to dado height. A masonry fireplace is located on the east wall of the Lounge, and is flanked on either side by small upper awning windows with stained glass infill.

South of the Foyer is the weatherboard extension containing the Kitchen, Office, Store, and access corridor. A large framed opening in the southern wall of the Foyer opens into the corridor, which in turn links to the Kitchen and the Office. The Kitchen has a vinyl floor, plasterboard walls and ceiling, and in-built cabinetry. The Office has plasterboard walls and ceiling, and carpet flooring. The Store is adjacent to the Office but is only accessible externally, via the east elevation.

Overall, the *Old Mill Theatre* is in good condition. There is evidence of recent renovations to the place which do not appear to be fully in accordance with Burra Charter principles and compromise the authenticity of the place. These include the introduction of imitation “historic details” where none existed before, such as timber wall paneling and paneled timber doors.

Old Mill Theatre has undergone both internal and external alterations and additions and has a moderate level of authenticity. Externally, the original tuck-pointed brickwork with sand finished rendered details has been painted, and the galvanized corrugated iron roof has been replaced with Colourbond zincalume. Structures have been added to the rear (east) of the building, a weatherboard lean-to housing the kitchen, an extension to the lean-to housing an office and store, and a double volume brick addition used for storage. Fenestrations have been bricked in along the south and east walls. Internally, a number of alterations have dramatically changed the original appearance of the place, most notably the solid timber paneling that has been applied to walls in the Foyer and Constance Ord Lounge. Other internal changes include the paneling of the ceilings, the installation of new lighting and ceiling fans, and the laying of carpet throughout most of the rooms.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

Old Mill Theatre, comprising a free-standing single-storey painted brick and iron Federation Free Classical style building, may be compared to a number of contemporaneous buildings of similar function, similar architectural style in the City of South Perth, and works by the same architect.

The HCWA database reveals ten former Mechanics’ Institutes, four of which are on the State Register, namely Mechanics’ Institute (fmr) in Kalgoorlie (1902), Mechanics’ Institute, Katanning (1896; 1900-04; 1906; 1907; 1928; 1952), Toodyay Public Library (formerly Mechanics’ Institute, and Road Board Office) in Toodyay (1874), and Mechanics’ Institute, Guildford (1865;

c1880). Of these, only the Mechanics' Institute (fmr) in Kalgoorlie, and Mechanics' Institute, Katanning, are of comparable time period. The Toodyay Public Library is also comparable to the *Old Mill Theatre* in terms of former function, as the only other place listed on the State Register with the combined functions of Mechanics' Institute and Road Board Office.

Mechanics' Institute (fmr) on Hannan Street, Kalgoorlie, comprises a two-storey Federation Filigree style brick and iron building, constructed in 1902 to provide additional facilities for the members of the Kalgoorlie Miners' Institute. The place has lesser integrity and authenticity than *Old Mill Theatre*, and is in poorer condition.

Mechanics' Institute, Katanning, comprises a single-storey brick building, of no identified architectural style, forming an important element of the town hall complex, constructed in 1896 for the education of working people in Katanning. The place is similar to *Old Mill Theatre* in terms of integrity and authenticity, but is in poorer condition.

Toodyay Public Library comprises an eclectic-style single-storey brick and iron building with stuccoed façade, constructed in 1874, and used throughout its life as a library, meeting space, town hall, theatre, council chamber, and social centre. The Toodyay Public Library is comparable to *Old Mill Theatre* in terms of condition and authenticity, but has lesser integrity. As with *Old Mill Theatre*, Toodyay Public Library has continuously had a key role in the cultural and administrative life of the town.

The HCWA database lists two hundred and twenty-six places in the Federation Free Classical style, four of these places are located in the City of South Perth, namely Hungerford's Shop at 254 Mill Point Road (1910), Corner Shop & Offices (1900 to 1915) at 252 Mill Point Road, Shops (1900 to 1915) at 16-22 Mends Street, and the Windsor Hotel (1898) at the corner of Mill Point Road and Mends Street. Of these places, only the Windsor Hotel is on the State Register.

Windsor Hotel is a two-storey brick and iron Federation Filigree style building with Italianate details, featuring decorative cast iron filigree wrap around verandahs, and constructed in 1898. The place may be compared to *Old Mill Theatre* in terms of time period, location, condition, and authenticity, but has lesser integrity.

There are three other works attributed to the architect Henry James Prockter listed on the HCWA database, all of which are in the Federation Free Classical style of architecture. Of these places, the North Perth Town Hall Complex (1902 to 1910), and Northam Town Hall/Lesser Hall ((1898 to 1901), are on the State Register.

Old Mill Theatre is a representative example of the Federation Free Classical style of architecture and is a modest representation of the work of the architect, Henry James Prockter. *Old Mill Theatre* is a relatively rare extant example of a former Mechanics' Institute, and one of only two listed on the HCWA database known to have been designed to combine the function of Mechanics' Institute and Road Board Office.

13. 4 KEY REFERENCES

No key references.

13. 5 FURTHER RESEARCH

The significance of the place in the context of development of amateur theatre in Western Australia has not been ascertained.