

**Place name** Briagolong Mechanics' Institute

**Survey Date:**

**Other name**

**Id:** 1340

**Street** 9 to 11 Avon Street

**Last Update**

**Locality** Briagolong

**Postcode**

**Official Locality**

**Property No** HO78

**Local Government Area** Wellington Shire

**Property Info**

**Precinct:** Precinct - Briagolong Mechanics'

**Easting**

**Northing**

**Map** Briagolong Township Map

**Workshop number**

**Workshop votes**

**Field survey number**

**Community priority**

**Designer**

**Builder**

**Ownership**

**Built Date**

**Change Date**

**Description** The Mechanics' Institute is constructed of red gum timber with red gum weatherboard cladding, which is still original. The building is roofed with corrugated iron with shingle still intact over original parts of the building. (RNE 100621)

Condition and Integrity : The original building was 40ft by 18ft, with all expansions made by the end of the nineteenth century. Since then small alterations in line with the original building have been made. The building is in a fair to deteriorated state with doors, doorways, windows and spouting in need of repair to keep the building functional. (RNE 100621)

**Condition**

**Integrity**

**History** Built in 1874 by Mr Robert Vick this building has been added to on many occasions to become what it is today. The small box at the front of the hall is a bio-box (projection box) which in its days was used to screen, silent, and later colour and sound, pictures. Like most halls this hall has served the community as a meeting place and for many social functions. Photos of many Briagolong pioneers adorn the walls of the supper room and an original Mechanics Institute (Briagolong Village Heritage Walk [14]).

The 1907 Rules and Regulations of the Briagolong Mechanics' Institute outlined the organisation's objective as 'the diffusion of literary, scientific and other useful knowledge and amusement'. This purpose would be chiefly attained 'by means of a Free Public Lending Library and Reading Room'. Due to the foresight of the Briagolong community, that library is still intact. In keeping with the philosophy behind the formation of Mechanics' Institute that operating from Briagolong was organised along democratic lines. Membership was unlimited and fees entitled subscribers to the loan of books and half price admission to lectures and monthly assemblies. A committee was elected by majority vote and meetings convened to discuss matters ranging from maintenance issues to social functions. Minute books, buried in a cupboard donated by the local debating society are invaluable records of community events and regional milestones. Few documents provide more intimate detail than a resolution in 1955 that 'Mr Black be given permission to have liquor in the hall at his Golden Wedding Anniversary'.

Written evidence aside, the building itself is an important witness to an evolving community. Built in 1874 as an impressive, relatively large weatherboard structure, the Mechanic's Institute was initially intended as a skilled workers' club and educational facility. Laurie Manning writes in Briagolong and District (1984), 'owing to the lack of technical and further education available in those times, they aimed to provide something to fill the gap'. Entertainment functions, however, seemed a no less valid item on the hall's agenda. Church groups, politicians, musicians and dancing parties counted for its use. Accommodating such varied activities as quoit playing, skating and billiard games, the building's popularity prompted Mr Wullemin to denounce the hall committee at the 1909 November meeting: 'the building was too much given up to amusement and not enough use made of its educational facilities'. His view of the 'Whizz Bang Concert Party' hosted in 1920 can only be imagined.

Despite some apprehensions, Briagolong Mechanics' Institute bears witness to changing trends in community entertainment. Remnants of a ticket window and bio-box document the advent of moving pictures, while the installation of a telephone on a trial basis in 1953 speaks of the pace of technological change. Modern toilet

facilities appended in 1977 were an essential renovation constructed in harmony with the original architecture. Even the seemingly excessive 'special' hall meeting in 1912 regarding the erection of a street light opposite the building heralded the end of an era for patrons: previously dances had been scheduled close to a full moon to enable a safe walk home'.

Classified by the National Trust in 1968, Briagolong Mechanics' Institute was constructed from red gum supplied by Mr Forbes' nearby mill. Like other local structures of its type, it has historically served social, intellectual and cultural needs of residents. Modern facilities and a dedicated committee today ensure that the hall remains an accessible, dynamic focus for the local community (Monash Public History Group 1994:105)

| Heritage Protections Register   | Reference | Zoning | Status |
|---------------------------------|-----------|--------|--------|
| National Trust Register         | 2213      |        | Listed |
| Planning Scheme                 | HO78      |        | Listed |
| Register of the National Estate | 004801    |        | Listed |

#### National Estate

#### Research Required

#### Recommendations

#### Fieldwork priority?

**Stage 1 Ranking** Assessed & protected **Stage 2 priority** No Action: Already include

**Final Ranking** **Final Recommendation** Amendment C26

**Statement of significance** The Mechanics' Institute is significant in its townscape as it is aesthetically and structurally a place of great character. The building is unique in the fact that it is built from red gum timber sawn and produced locally in the late nineteenth century. A large part of the original Free Library is in existence in the building, including books used by a debating society in the 1870s. All alterations over the years have been done in line with the general character of the original building. (RNE 100621)

#### Extent of designation

#### Informant

#### Notes

#### Follow up

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|---------------------|--|
| <b>Bibliography</b> | Baragwanath, P. & Hodgson, J., (1994 onwards), An inventory of Mechanics Institutes in Victoria. (Unpublished inventory, Historic Places Branch)<br>Barracough, L. & D. Watt, (1994), Briagolong Mechanics' Institute: More than Just a place of amusement, Kapana Press, Bairnsdale<br>Manning, L., (1984), A chronological history of Briagolong and District, Unpublished - copy held at the centre for Gippsland Studies<br>Monash Public History Group, (1994), Macalister Landscapes: History and Heritage in Maffra Shire, Kapana Press in association with the Centre for Gippsland Studies, Bairnsdale, 105 |
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