

South Australian
Heritage Act 1978-80:

HERITAGE SURVEY
ITEM IDENTIFICATION SHEET

REGION 6 :
SOUTH EAST

Item No. : ROB:013
ITEM NAME: Institute Building
Former or other names:

LOCATION:

Address: Smillie Street,
Robe

Allotment:

Section :

Hundred : Waterhouse

County : Robe

L.G.A. : Robe

S.H.P. Region: 6

A.M.G., Ref. Z: 54 N: 5886125

E: 389500

TYPE OF ITEM:

Description: Meeting Rooms

Subject: 2.06

Period: 1860-1880

Date: 1868 - Condition: Well Kept

Architect: William T. Gore

Builder: Savage and Kerr

STATUS State Heritage List: Registered

National Estate :

National Trust : Classified

HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

RECOMMENDATION: State

Description:

Simple stuccoed building of large proportions with decorated surrounds to single and four-paned sash windows. Keystones to segmental arches over windows and panelled door with fanlight over. String course at mid-window height and moulded cornice near top of parapet wall which conceals hipped roof. New additions in similar style virtually indistinguishable from original building.

A Mechanics' Institute was formed in 1862, using the Presbyterian Chapel Room. For an Institute building the Government granted part of the "Village Green". 'A special feature of the building was the use of Morewood's Iron on the roof, which was suggested by the contractors, Messrs. Savage and Kerr' (K. Bermingham). The most recent extension was in 1983. The Oddfellows Lodge used the "West Room" for many years, and the Institute has always maintained a library.

Report Text:

REFERENCES: K. Bermingham, "Gateway to the South East" pp. 83, 87-91

Verbal: Michael Cox

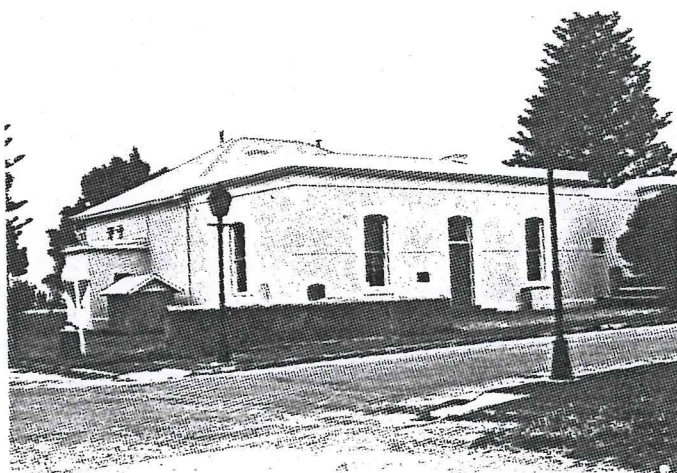
PHOTOGRAPHS:

Slide No : 20/4

Film No : 22

Negative No: 10

Archival No:



DANVERS ARCHITECTS Date: 1983

TO: The Register Sub-Committee, South Australian Heritage Committee

RE: REGISTER NOMINATION:
- INSTITUTE BUILDING, ROBE

SUMMARY

This building is the subject of a State Heritage Fund project concerning the restoration and adaptation of this building. It is therefore put to the Register Sub-Committee for consideration as a possible State Heritage Item.

Architecturally the Institute Building is significant for being an interesting example of an early Regency style influenced public building which has a relatively intact interior.

Historically it is important for being one of the earliest institutes erected in South Australia, for being associated with the boom period of Robe, and for being representative of Institute Buildings associated with Victorian cultural and recreational life.

Environmentally the building is significant for being a familiar and conspicuous building in Robe, for contributing to and forming part of an attractive streetscape, and for maintaining and reinforcing the Victorian character of the area.

The integrity of the building is quite good for its age, being in good physical condition and virtually intact inside. It has, however, been rendered and had several additions added to it.

The Institute is Classified by the National Trust of South Australia, and is located in a proposed Heritage Area.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Institute Building at Robe be included upon the Register of State Heritage Items, and that it be categorised A2, A3, H2, and H3.

Raymond O. Harrison FRAIA
SENIOR HERITAGE OFFICER

Barry G. Rowney
Barry G. Rowney
SENIOR HISTORIC ARCHITECT

4/6/81
MAB:JD

EVALUATION ANALYSIS: INSTITUTE BUILDING, ROBE

Criterion	Comment	Grading					
		E	VG	A/G	F/P	N/A	
A. <u>Architecture</u>							
1. Architect/Designer Builder	W.T. Gore Messrs. Savage and Kerr			*			
2. Age	Erected 1868		*				
3. Style	Regency influenced front section.			*			
4. Design	Reflects how building was designed in two stages.			*			
5. Construction	Coursed painted bluestone; rendered plinth and cornice. Building now rendered.			*			
6. Interior	Intact			*			
B. <u>History</u>							
7. Person/Group	Mechanics Institute formed in early 1862 to form a library for Robe and to collect monies for an Institute Building.		*				
8. Event	State Government granted present site to Institute Committee in 1866. Also associated with boom period of Robe.		*				
9. Context	Cultural and recreational centre of Robe. Representative of institute buildings associated with Victorian cultural life.			*			

Criterion	Comment	Grading				
		E	VG	A/G	F/P	N/A
C. <u>Environment</u>						
10. Streetscape	Contributes to and forms part of an attractive streetscape located in proposed Heritage Area.		*			
11. Local Character	Important in establishing and maintaining Victorian character of area.		*			
12. Landmark	Familiar and conspicuous building in Robe.		*			
D. <u>Integrity</u>						
13. Alterations	External walls rendered. Projection booth added to western side. Toilets and storeroom added to eastern side.			*		
14. Condition	Generally in good condition.			*		
E. <u>Adaptability</u>						
15. Compatibility	Compatible with zoning	*				
16. Adaptability	Considerable potential for adaptation.		*			
17. Interpretation	High potential.		*			
18. Services	Basic services already supplied.		*			
19. Economics	Present proposal to jointly fund restoration/adaption project from State Heritage Fund and State Library Funds.					

Mark A Butcher.

Mark Butcher
Register Supervisor

Anne Aeuckens
Register Historian

Mark A Butcher.

Mark Butcher
Register Supervisor

Annelie Aeuckens
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4/6/81

HISTORICAL RESEARCH: INSTITUTE BUILDING, ROBE

Robe was the first major regional port in the South-East of the State, being established in 1846 by the South Australian Government, and for 20 years it functioned as the centre of the direct wool export trade to Britain in this area. This role, which brought a substantial amount of affluence to the town, continued until the late 1860s when the development of Port MacDonnell and Port Caroline (Kingston) effectively eclipsed Robe and led to its decline as a wool port. This was accelerated from 1876 when a rail-head was constructed at Kingston, and by 1888, Robe was no longer handling direct exports to Great Britain.

"By 1856, Robe was the second major colonial wool out-port and by the end of the decade was the major regional port in terms of the value, if not the volume, of wool shipped overseas.

In the 1860s Robe, both in terms of value and wool exported, ranked amongst the top three out-ports in South Australia. The figures for 1864 for example show that of the ten wool outlets on the South Australian coast only four carried significant trade - Port Robe; Port Augusta; Port Wakefield; Port MacDonnell".


Thus it was that towards the end of this "boom period", the Robe Institute was built in 1868 at a total cost of £1,066/6/6. A Public meeting, held on 27 February, 1862, in the Presbyterian Chapel Room, saw the first formation of a Mechanics' Institute in Robe, which set about forming a library for the town and collecting money for an Institute Building. In March, 1866, the Institute Committee was notified that it had been granted the quarter-acre block by the State Government which it had applied for, and on which the Institute now stands. The building was completed in 1868, the year in which the Institute became incorporated, and consisted of a Hall, with retiring room and porch, the Library, and the "West Room", which was rented by the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows Lodge once a fortnight for 44 years. Within two years the library contained approximately 2,000 books and was open six nights a week to the public. In addition, lectures and readings were held regularly;

"The Hall had its jubilee singers, its acrobats, its ventriloquists, its pianists, and its dramatic casts - some of fine quality, some poor, but all with a desire to do their best.

Formal balls, fancy dress and masquerade balls, private dances, bazaars, strawberry fetes all had their place in the Hall - ..., but all helping to make a mosaic of country life with life-long links stretching far beyond the little town".

Locally there is no doubt that "It was around this Institute that the cultural and recreation life of the township centered", and that it may well have been that, "the Library was known throughout the Province as one of the finest to be found in any country centre". Certainly, the building of the Institute in 1868 would have meant that it was amongst the earliest country Institutes to be constructed in the nineteenth century, the majority of which appeared from the 1870s on. Both the Mount Gambier and Robe Institutes were built in the year 1868, and both are on the Classified List of the National Trust of South Australia. The Robe Institute is not, however, listed on The National Estate Register. In addition, the Institute is located on the northern side of the Smillie Street area which has been defined as one of the heritage areas of Robe and as such helps to retain the pre-1870 character of the majority of the buildings in this area.

Sources: Eleven Tales of Robe by Kathleen Bermingham,
1968, Robe Institute Centenary Appeal Committee.
The Fourth Eleven Tales of Robe by Kathleen
Bermingham, 1973, the South Eastern Times, Millicent.
Robe Conservation Study Part I.


Anneli Aeuckens
Register Historian

May 1981

