

SUMMARY OF STATE HERITAGE PLACE

REGISTER ENTRY

**Entry in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with the
*Heritage Places Act 1993***

NAME: Former Brighton Town Hall **PLACE NO.:** 26431

ADDRESS: 388 Brighton Road, Hove SA 5048
CT 5148/889 Allotment 1 D36909 Hundred Noarlunga

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The former Brighton Town Hall demonstrates the establishment of local government and the development of social and cultural life in Brighton. It is closely associated with the formation of the community of Brighton, which was amongst the earliest of the inner metropolitan Adelaide suburbs.

The place is associated with Australia's first female politician, Susan Grace Benny. As the setting of her two terms of office as Councillor between 1919 and 1922, the building is closely associated with the participation of women in the democratic process in South Australia.

RELEVANT CRITERIA (under section 16 of the *Heritage Places Act 1993*)

(a) it demonstrates important aspects of the evolution or pattern of the State's history.

The former Brighton Town Hall demonstrates important aspects of the evolution of the State's history, specifically the establishment of local government and the development of social and cultural life in colonial South Australia.

Brighton's District Council was amongst the first local councils to be established, and its Town Hall is one of the earliest surviving Town Halls/ Council Chambers in the State.

It is closely associated with formation of the community of Brighton, which was amongst the earliest of the inner metropolitan suburbs, and it played a significant role in the social and cultural life of its citizens for over 120 years.

The former Brighton Town Hall is associated with Australia's first female politician, Susan Grace Benny.

(g) it has a special association with the life or work of a person or organisation or an event of historical importance.

The former Brighton Town Hall has a special association with Susan Grace Benny, the first woman to achieve political office at any level of government in Australia, and a pioneer of women's participation in the democratic process in South Australia.

As the setting of her two terms in office between 1919 and 1922, the building is closely associated with an important milestone in the social and political history of the State relating to the participation of women in the democratic process, where South Australia is acknowledged to have taken an early lead.

At the time that Mrs Benny was appointed to the Brighton Council as Councillor for Seacliff Ward, the Town Hall also acted as the Council Chambers, so was where she served between 1919 and 1922. Mrs Benny's appointment has symbolic importance at the State level because it marks a significant milestone in the political advancement of women in South Australia. She was the first woman in the country to benefit from the amendment of electoral laws to promote gender equality in the electoral process.

SITE PLAN

Former Brighton Town Hall
388 Brighton Road, Hove SA 5048

PLACE NO: 26431



Former Brighton Town Hall generally indicating the extent of listing (outlined in orange)

COMMENTARY ON THE LISTING

Description and notes with respect to a place entered in the South Australian Heritage Register in accordance with the *Heritage Places Act 1993*

Physical Description

The former Brighton Town Hall is located in the Council area of the City of Holdfast Bay, in the southern metropolitan area of Adelaide. The original (1869) section of the Hall comprises a simple, single-storey rectangular building running east-west, with frontage to Brighton Road. It is located immediately to the north of the Hove Station on the Adelaide to Brighton railway line. The hall is of quite modest dimensions, described as '48 feet long, by a breadth of 28 feet, and 20 feet in height' (approximately 15m x 9m x 6m) and originally included a raised platform of 8 feet (2.5m) at the eastern end. The building is of limestone construction over a concrete foundation, with brick quoins and stucco dressings. Exterior walls are now rendered and painted, but the front façade was once lined to represent dressed stone. It has a steeply-pitched gable-ended roof laid with terracotta tiles (originally corrugated iron – possibly slate?), and three round-arched windows set high up on each of the north and south elevations. Historical photographs show that the western elevation originally contained a central entranceway sheltered by a small portico, with a pair of semi-circular headed 'blind' windows on either side. Evidence of the location of these original features on the western façade has been revealed by the recent removal of the later (1954) addition to the front of the building. Above the central door opening there is a circular niche with stucco surround. At the time of its completion the building was described as being 'in the Gothic style of architecture' (SA Register, 23 September 1869 p3), however the simple massing, parapeted gable and semi-circular arched windows suggest Victorian Romanesque might be the more applicable term (Apperley et al).

A small addition to the rear was added in 1874 for use as a meeting room and in 1896 the wide archway at the eastern end of the building was included to enable the back room to be converted into a stage.

The components identified as being intrinsic to the heritage significance of the former Brighton Town Hall **include**:

- the original form, materials and details of the 1869 hall, together with 1874 and 1896 additions.

The extent of listing **excludes** all twentieth century modifications and additions.

History of the Place

The District Council of Brighton was proclaimed on 3 November 1853, the twentieth local government authority to be set up in the South Australian colony. Five years later the district was divided, and the Corporate Town of Brighton was established along with those of Marion and Glenelg.

The initial five Council members were appointed by the Governor, with Major TS O'Halloran selected as Chairman. One of their first decisions was to appoint Mr F Pearce as Council Clerk and Rate Collector for the District. The first election of representatives of ratepayers within the district took place at a public meeting on 3 March 1856.

Council meetings were initially conducted in rooms at the Thatched House Tavern, and later the Brighton Inn. From around 1863 it is believed that the Council met in a building on the northern corner of Brighton Road and Hulbert Street until 1869. A meeting of ratepayers was held on 2 October 1868 to discuss the accommodation needs of the Council, and shortly afterwards the decision was made to purchase land for the construction of combined Council Chambers and Town Hall. Plans for the building were prepared free of charge by local carpenter and joiner George William Highet who then successfully tendered for the construction, along with Edward Turner for the masonry and brickwork and George Sansom for the plastering and stuccoing. It is interesting to note that GW Highet, an early pioneer of the district, had a long association with the Council, serving variously as Town Clerk, Auditor and Councillor over a twenty year period.

Completed in September 1869 at a cost of £320, it was only the fourth town hall built in the colony, after those of Kensington and Norwood (1859), Adelaide and Port Adelaide (both 1866). The 1859 Norwood Town Hall was replaced with the present structure in 1883 (SHP 12721), making the Brighton Town Hall now the third oldest surviving Town Hall in the State. If purpose-built stand-alone Council Chambers are also taken into account, only the Highercombe, Bungaree and Burnside Chambers pre-date Brighton (see Appendix for complete list of State Heritage listed Town Halls and Council Chambers).

The official opening of the Brighton Town Hall on 22 September 1869 was celebrated with a tea meeting and concert, attended by a large gathering of local residents and presided over by Brighton's Mayor, Mr Nicholls. Over the next seventy years this building served a vital role within the local community. Apart from its primary purpose as the venue for Council meetings, centre of local government administration, and venue for public meetings of the citizenry of Brighton, it also accommodated the Institute reading room and public library, and served as the meeting place for a multitude of local clubs and associations. Amongst these were the Rechabite Lodge, Brighton Band of Hope, Oddfellows, Good Templars, Volunteer Rifles, Freemasons, Literary and Debating Societies, as well as a venue for concerts and socials, lantern lectures, political meetings, moving pictures and variety shows. It was also used during the day to accommodate a grammar school,

and a girls' school, hired out for Sunday religious services, and even operated for a time as a roller skating rink.

Early photographs show a stone and brick boundary wall, built in 1871, flanking the entry off Brighton Road, and there was a public well nearby. The original 1869 hall was extended several times, firstly in 1874 when a small meeting room was added at the rear, along with a toilet. In 1896 the eastern wall of the Hall was opened up enabling this back room to be converted into a stage, complete with proscenium arch, and creating a room beneath used for storage. The hall was provided with electric lighting in 1914, and by 1919 a large addition to the front of the building had been completed.

By 1921 the Town Hall had become inadequate for the needs of the growing town, and consideration was being given to building new Municipal Offices and Council Chamber. This eventually resulted in the completion of a new Art Deco style building on Jetty Road in 1938 (SHP No 14464). In 1929 the Institute relocated to a new building on the corner of Brighton Road and Torr Road, known as Bagshaw Hall, and the Town Hall continued as the Mothers and Babies' Health Association (1925) and the Brighton, Seacliff and Marion sub-branch of the Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League (1935). After the Council offices moved to the new premises in 1938, the Returned Services League (RSL) and Mothers and Babies Health Centre continued as the main tenants.

By 1954 the Aged and Invalid Pensioners Association was also based there, and around that time the 1919 addition to the front of the building was demolished and replaced with a new front section built in brick. The lease to the RSL (by then operating as the RSL Bowling Club) expired in 1970 and was not renewed, but the club continued to occupy the site until relocating to new council-owned premises jointly with the Brighton Bowling Club Inc in 2008. The Hall has apparently been unoccupied since. In December 2011 the Holdfast Bay Council resolved to revoke the Community Land status for the portion of the site occupied by the former Town Hall building, and to dispose of the property as a potential redevelopment site. The Council recently demolished the 1954 brick additions to the front of the building, which according to a 2013 structural engineering assessment had become unsafe.

The Town Hall was recommended as a local heritage place in both the Brighton Heritage Survey (Dallwitz & Holt, 1991) and the Brighton Heritage Review (McDougall & Vines, 1998) and was entered in the City of Holdfast Bay Development Plan as a local heritage place in the Development Plan Amendment authorised on 29 March 2001 (No. 4434).

Association with Susan Grace Benny

Contributing to the significance of this site is its association with the pioneering female politician Susan Grace Benny, who in 1919 became the first woman in Australia to hold political office at any level of government.

Mrs Susan Grace Benny (known as Grace) was the wife of former mayor of Brighton (1903-05) and later federal senator, Benjamin Benny. Mrs Benny was herself appointed as a Councillor representing the newly created ward of Seacliff on the Brighton District Council on 22 December 1919. Though not elected in the formal sense, her appointment followed a nomination from the Seacliff Progress Association, supported by a petition drawn up and signed by the majority of ratepayers of Brighton asking the Governor to appoint her as one of two councillors for the new ward. An educated and intellectually acute woman with an interest in politics and social justice, she sought public office as a means to advance the position of women in the area. A contemporary report on her appointment explicitly refers to her motivation as follows:

She entered the Council from a sense of Public Duty, believing that there is work to be done in Municipal life which will not even be commenced unless a woman undertakes it.

(The Adelaide Observer, 20 December, 1919, P.46).

During World War I she had been president of the women's branch of the South Australian Liberal Union (the political party led by Archibald Pearce, which held power in SA intermittently between 1910 and 1920). In this capacity she had been influential in ensuring that equality of divorce for women was placed on the party's platform, leading to an amendment of the divorce laws in 1918. At the time of her appointment to the Council a fulsome account of her achievements published in the Advertiser described her as a 'live wire', and 'broad minded and tolerant, and by no means a woman of the suffragette type, and probably is better known in Brighton than any other woman in the district' (*Advertiser*, 13 December 1919, p1).

Mrs Benny served on the Brighton Council for two terms, retiring after unsuccessfully running for the position of Mayor in 1922. She would have attended Council meetings in the Brighton Town Hall throughout this period. Mrs Benny went on to an active career outside politics, establishing and running an employment agency for working women in Adelaide. She is recognised by the Local Government Association with the naming of a scholarship for young women seeking a career in local government.

References

- *Advertiser*, 13 December 1919, p11
- *SA Register*, 23 September 1869, p3
- Apperly, R, Irving, R & Reynolds, P, *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney 1989
- Dallwitz, J, & Holt, A, *Brighton Heritage Survey*, 1991

- Edgar, S, 'Benny, Susan Grace (1872–1944)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography*, Australian National University (accessed online at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/benny-susan-grace-5213/text8775>, 16 May 2014)
- Flightpath Architects, *Conservation Plan for the former Brighton Town Hall and Surrounds* (prepared for the City of Holdfast Bay), October 2009
- Holt, AG, *The Vanishing Sands: Commemorating 150 Years of Brighton, South Australia*, City of Brighton, 1991
- McDougall, K, & Vines, E, *Brighton Heritage Review*, 1998
- Oldfield, S, (ed), *International Woman Suffrage: Ius Suffragii*, Vol 2, November 1, 1915, Routledge 2003, p217 (accessed online at <http://books.google.com.au>, 16 May 2014)
- Robbins, E J, and Robbins, JR, *A Glossary of Local Government Areas in South Australia, 1840-1985*, Historical Society of South Australia, 1987
- Taylor, H A F, *History of Brighton South Australia*, District Council of Brighton, 1958
- Heritage Places Database <http://apps.planning.sa.gov.au/HeritageSearch>
- Local Government Association of SA website <http://www.lga.sa.gov.au/page.aspx?u=240>
- Adelaidia website <http://adelaidia.sa.gov.au/people/susan-grace-benny>
- Australian Women's Register website <http://trove.nla.gov.au/people/737079?c=people>
- State Library of SA photographic collection
- Additional material provided by nominator (includes material from the City of Holdfast Bay History Centre).

SITE DETAILS

Former Brighton Town Hall
388 Brighton Road, Hove SA 5048

PLACE NO: 26431

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| FORMER NAME: | N/A |
| DESCRIPTION OF PLACE: | A simple rectangular single-storey hall with limestone walls, steeply-pitched gabled roof clad with terracotta tiles, rendered brick quoins and stucco dressings. Includes single room brick extension to the rear with parapet walls. Excludes 20 th Century additions. |
| DATE OF COMPLETION: | 1869 |
| SA HERITAGE REGISTER STATUS: | Description: Confirmed Date: 12 December 2014 |
| LOCAL HERITAGE STATUS | Local Heritage Place No 4434 Inserted in the City of Holdfast Bay Development Plan 29 March 2001 |
| CURRENT USE: | Description: Vacant Dates: 2008-present |
| PREVIOUS USE(S): | Description: Social Club/ Bowling Club Baby Health Centre Institute and Library Private School Town Hall and Council Chambers Dates: 1869-2008 |
| ARCHITECT: | Name: George William Highet Dates: 1869 |
| BUILDER: | Name: E Turner, G Sansom & G W Highet Dates: 1869 |
| LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: | Description: City of Holdfast Bay |
| LOCATION: | Unit No.: Street No.: 388 Street Name: Brighton Road Town/Suburb: Hove |

LAND DESCRIPTION:

Post Code: 5048
Title Type: CT
Volume: 5148
Folio: 889
Lot No.: 1
Plan No.: D36909
Section:
Hundred: Noarlunga

PHOTOS

Former Brighton Town Hall
388 Brighton Road, Hove SA 5048

PLACE NO: 26431



People arriving at a function at the Town Hall Brighton, 1918 (image supplied by nominator). Note original small portico and limestone and brick boundary wall



Brighton Town Hall, November 2013 after demolition of western additions (DEWNR 2013)

PHOTOS

Former Brighton Town Hall
388 Brighton Road, Hove SA 5048

PLACE NO: 26431



The former Brighton Town Hall, western elevation after removal of the 1954 brick façade. (DEWNR 2014)



Northern elevation from former bowling green.

(DEWNR 2014)



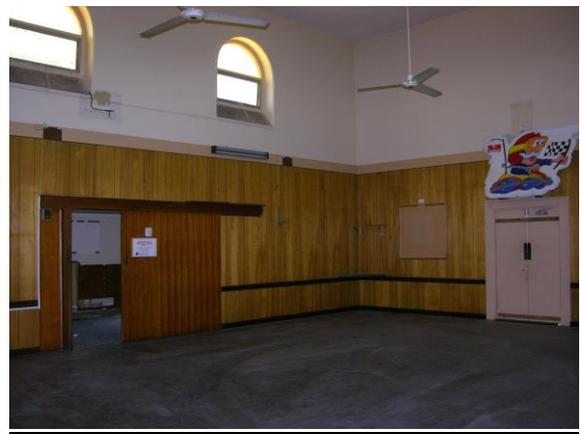
Rear (eastern elevation) showing parapet walls of 1874 addition (DEWNR 2014)



View from north-east showing 1874 additions at rear (DEWNR 2014)



Interior showing proscenium arch (former 1896 stage) at eastern end of hall with RSL Club bar and timber wall panelling (DEWNR, 2014)



Interior, south-western corner of main hall, with front doors on right (DEWNR 2014)

PHOTOS

Former Brighton Town Hall
388 Brighton Road, Hove SA 5048

PLACE NO: 26431



Brighton Town Hall as it was at the time that Susan Grace Benny served as a Councillor, c1920 (SLSA photographic collection, PRG 280/1/20/43)



Councillor Susan Grace Benny c1919