

Heritage Overlay No.: 076
Citation No.: 210
Place: Former Melton Courthouse

Other Names of Place: Melton Court House, Melton Tourist Information Centre.
Location: 323-329 High Street, Melton
Critical Dates: Constructed 1892.
Existing Heritage Listings: None
Recommended Level of Significance: STATE



Statement of Significance:

The former Melton Court House (now the Melton Tourist Information Centre), 323-329 High Street, Melton, is significant as the only surviving brick example of a Federation styled court house building in Victoria. Built in 1892 at a cost of £857.11.0 by building contractors, Brooke and Brundell to a design by the Public Works Department Architect, Samuel E. Bindley, the former court house is predominantly intact.

The former Melton Court House is architecturally significant at a STATE level (AHC D.2, E.1). It demonstrates original design qualities of a Federation style which are rare for a late nineteenth century court house building. These qualities include the gable roof form that

traverses the site, together with the elevated gable roof form (comprising the court room) and the skillion verandah with gable entrance portico that projects towards the front. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the asymmetrical composition, single storey height, face brick wall construction, slate roof cladding, two face brick and multi-corbelled chimneys, modest eaves, three small horizontally-proportioned, flat-arched, timber framed 3-paned clerestorey windows with cream brick voussoirs in the court room gable end, decorative gable infill (stuccoed panelling and timber battening supported by timber brackets) in the court room and verandah gable ends, decorative timber gable bargeboards, turned timber verandah posts, decorative timber verandah brackets, framed turned timber fretwork valance in the verandah gable (and the framing only in the remainder of the verandah), flat-arched timber framed double hung windows with cream brick voussoirs and the timber framed doorway with transom above.

The former Melton Court House is historically significant at a LOCAL level (AHC A.4, H.1). It is one of only two early buildings remaining in Melton's main shopping street, and the only nineteenth century building in the street. Its design and construction quality express the historical role of government in the community, in particular in regard to law and order and the administration of justice.

Overall, the former Melton Court House is of STATE significance.

Description:

The former Melton Court House, 323-329 High Street, Melton, has an open setting and is situated adjacent to (forward of) a local supermarket. The site is bound by introduced timber picket fences (approximately 1200 mm high) and there is a row of young exotic trees along the side.

The asymmetrical, single storey, red brick, Federation styled former court house building is characterised by a gable roof form that traverses the site, together with an elevated gable roof form (comprising the court room) and a skillion verandah with gable entrance portico that projects towards the front. These roof forms are clad in slate tiles. Two early face brick and multi-corbelled chimneys adorn the roofline. Modest overhangs are features of the eaves.

An early feature of the design is the prominent front court room gable. It has three small horizontally-proportioned, flat-arched, timber framed 3-paned clerestorey windows with cream brick voussoirs, above which is a decorative gable infill (stuccoed panelling and timber battening) supported by timber brackets. The gable end also has decorative (geometric pattern) timber bargeboards.

The decorative gable infill and timber bargeboards are also reflected on the verandah gable. The verandah is supported by turned timber posts and has decorative timber brackets and a framed turned timber fretwork valance in the verandah gable. The turned fretwork is missing from the remainder of the verandah valance.

Other early features of the design include the flat-arched timber framed double hung windows with cream brick voussoirs and the timber framed doorway with transom above.

Internally the characteristic courtroom fittings and furnishings including the bench, dock, and seating has been removed as part of its conversion to the Melton Tourist Office.

History:

A court was established in Melton by 1864, when the first recorded case was heard before Mr BA Porter JP, with Mr A Carroll as the Clerk of Courts. John James was convicted of being drunk, for which he was fined five shillings or 24 hours imprisonment. The court was held in the 'long room' of the old Melton Hotel, before moving to rented accommodation at the Raglan Hotel, and finally to the Roads Board office.¹

Tenders for construction of the present building were called for by the Public Works Department on 13th February 1892.² The architect Samuel Edward Brindley was born in Birmingham, England, in 1842. He was articled to the local architect, J.R. Botham, FRIBA, before emigrating to Victoria where he was employed as an architect in the Education Department from 18 August 1873. With the amalgamation of the architectural branch of the Education Department with the Public Works Department in 1884, Brindley was placed in charge of Victorian government building design for the North-Western District.³

In 1975, the Melton and District Historical Society became concerned at hearsay that the court house was to be demolished to make way for carparking space. Melton had been declared a 'satellite city' and was developing rapidly. A new shopping centre had recently been built at a setback of 60 feet (c.18 metre) from 323-329 High Street, and the court house, together with the adjacent weatherboard police station, had been left standing alone. A new police station was planned, and the weatherboard police station was subsequently demolished. In its nomination of the building for National Trust classification the Society argued that the Court House was 'the best of two early buildings left in the main street' (the other being a bluestone hotel) and that its loss would be 'tragic'. However the nomination was unsuccessful, the National Trust at the time judging that it was of no particular 'distinction' or 'antiquity'.⁴

The building continued to be used as a court house at least until 1991 when the Department of Housing and Construction (formerly the PWD) conducted a heritage study of court houses. By this time Federation-era architecture had achieved acceptance within the heritage movement. The building was recognised as being 'the only surviving example in brick of the Federation Queen Anne style which was used for court houses only twice.'⁵ Twenty years later when it was proposed to modify the eastern façade of the building to accommodate a café, the M&DHS was again concerned. This time the National Trust objected that the proposed extension would be an over-development of the site, and questioned the changes to the interior court room furnishings and fittings. The site never appears to have been nominated to the Victorian Heritage Register. It has since been converted into the Shire of Melton Tourist Information Centre.

Thematic Context / Comparative Analysis:

Melton Historical Themes: 'Community'

Known Comparable Examples in Victoria:

¹ Starr, J, *Melton: Plains of Promise*, Shire of Melton, nd (c.1985), p.261.

² *ibid*

³ Lewis, M (ed), 'The Australian Architectural Index, Revised Edition', University of Melbourne, Carlton, 2000.

⁴ National Trust of Australia (Victoria), File No.3740.

⁵ O'Neill, F, McIntosh, D, 'Court Houses in Victoria: a Survey' (Historic Buildings Branch, Housing and Construction, Victoria, 1990), 'Statement of Significance', and pp.130-131

According to the Court House Buildings database ⁶, together with survey of court houses conducted by the former Department of Environment and Housing⁷, and a recent Conservation Plan ⁸, the Federation style employed in the design of the Melton Court house was seldom used for court house buildings. Other comparable examples included the court houses at Korumburra, Brunswick and Dimboola. Of these:- Korumburra (1898-99), a timber building with a corrugated iron roof, has been relocated; Dimboola (1899-1900), a timber building with a corrugated iron roof, has been extended; and Brunswick (1899-1900), a brick building, has been demolished.⁹ The Melton building is the earliest example of this court house style, the only surviving brick wall / slate roof example of the style, and also the most intact (exterior) remaining example of this style.

Known Comparable Examples in Melton Shire:

Locally the court house is the only remaining nineteenth century building in the town centre, and, together with the 1910 former Melton Mechanics Institute and the small bluestone cottage now known as the Honey Shack, the only building in the town centre that is not modern.

Condition:

Good

Integrity:

High

Recommendations:

Recommended for inclusion in the Melton Planning Scheme Heritage Overlay
Recommended for inclusion on the Victorian Heritage Register.

Recommended Heritage Overlay Schedule Controls:

External Paint Controls:	<i>Yes</i>
Internal Alteration Controls:	<i>No</i>
Tree Controls:	<i>No</i>
Outbuildings and/or Fences:	<i>No</i>

⁶ Historic Places Section, Department of Sustainability and Environment

⁷ O'Neill, McIntosh, *op cit*.

⁸ Roger Beeston, 'Melton Court House Conservation Plan'

⁹ This was the situation at the time of the McIntosh O'Neill report in 1991.