

HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

Name	Mia Mia Hall	
Address	20 Valley Road MIA MIA	Grading 2008 Local
Building Type	Hall, Club/Hall, Social	
Assessment by	Context Pty Ltd	



Recommended VHR No HI No PS Yes
Heritage Protection

Maker / Builder Unknown

Integrity

Altered

History and Historical Context

History of the Shire of Strathfieldsaye

The land around the former Shires of Strathfieldsaye and McIvor had a long history prior to the arrival of Europeans. The Jaara Jaara people are the original inhabitants of the area.

The area around Port Phillip was explored by Sir Thomas Mitchell, the Surveyor General of New South Wales, and a large party in 1836, on the homeward leg of a journey to Portland Bay. Impressed by what he perceived as the bounty of the land, Mitchell named the area *Australia Felix*.^[1]

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The Port Phillip district was opened up for settlement soon thereafter, and much of the land in the Western districts of Victoria, including the former Shires of McIvor and Strathfieldsaye, was subsequently dominated by a series of pastoral runs. Most of the area around the town of Axedale and the numerous small towns in its vicinity was licensed to David Jennings as part of the Campaspe Plains run. The run covered an area of more than 144,900 acres and was populated with an estimated 12,000 sheep. A portion of Campaspe Plains was licensed to A. Jennings and George Playne in 1840 and the 67,000 acre station became known as Axedale. In the coming decade the holders of the license changed a number of times. By the time the leasehold over the land was cancelled in 1865, the run had greatly reduced in size.[2]

Following the cancellation of leasehold, land holdings were of a smaller scale and pastoralists were gradually overtaken by farmers. The discovery of gold at Bendigo and the surrounding areas changed the face of the district and brought about new patterns of settlement and expansion. William John Bulling claimed to be the first man to discover gold at McIvor, and he was granted a £400 reward for the find. By 1853, over one hundred prospectors had assembled at Wild Duck Creek in the hopes of striking it rich. This number expanded the following year, and included some 2,000 Chinese immigrants.[3]

The Strathfieldsaye Road District was proclaimed in the Government Gazette on the 12th August 1861, and encompassed within it the parishes of Axedale, Strathfieldsaye, Eppalock, Mandurang, Sedgwick and Lyell.[4] The process of election of the board was punctuated by rivalries between Catholic and Protestant faiths, a characteristic of the district which infiltrates much of its history. Strathfieldsaye met the criterion prescribed to become a Shire in 1863, a transition that was officially proclaimed on the 17th September of that year.[5]

In 1864, Strathfieldsaye Shire was divided into three wards; Mandurang, Strathfieldsaye and Axedale.[6]

History of Mia Mia

Mia Mia was originally known as Miami and developed in conjunction with the settlement at Heathcote. The small postal township developed in conjunction with the land around it, that was gradually taken up for agricultural and pastoral pursuits. Mia Mia shared in some of the benefits of the gold rushes, and a number of mines were established in the vicinity of the town. The industry provided for the establishment of a number of hotels, which found the majority of their clientele in association with the mines. The town was laid out just prior to the first land sales, which occurred in 1860.

History of Mia Mia Hall, 20 Valley Road, Mia Mia

The Mia Mia Hall is built on land Crown Allotment 6 of Section 9 in the Township of Mia Mia (formerly the Parish of Spring Plains) that was originally granted to Frederick Westblade in the 1880s. His allotment was a small one, covering a mere three roods, 24 perches, and was presumably bought as a site for the construction of his home.[7] Westblade is listed on titles records as a resident of Mia Mia, but his profession is not recorded.[8]

It is not known if Westblade undertook any construction on his lot. He did, however, take out a mortgage over the property on the 5th July 1879, to the Bank of Victoria. Mortgages were often used as a means of raising finance to undertake construction, and this may have been true in Westblade's case.[9] Westblade also owned a further block of land, located to the eastern side of the town. The Westblade family is recorded on Parish Plans as owning a series of lots on this side of the town, which together amount to a sizeable parcel.[10] Westblade owned series of additional larger allotments of a much larger size, on the outskirts of the township of Mia Mia. One lot abutted the Campaspe River, and the assumption can be made that Westblade was a grazier or involved in agricultural pursuits.[11]

The Westblade family was prominent in the Shire of McIvor, and had been involved in a number of important developments in the district. Frederick Westblade had been one of the first individuals to take advantage of the 42nd Section of Grant's Amended Land Act after 1865, which allowed the selection of small blocks of land.[12] Westblade was also a director of the McIvor Flour Milling and Quartz Crushing Company, that was floated in February 1861 but did

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not see much success. [13] When not farming or speculating, Frederick Westblade was a wrestler of some renown, and is said to have at one time won the Wrestling Championship of Bendigo.[14]

Westblade sold the land to Michael Francis Dwyer on the 28th March 1893. Dwyer was a grazier already residing in Mia Mia. Besides Westblade's land, Dwyer bought a number of small town lots at the same time, which brought the total parcel of land to over 26 acres.[15] Dwyer took out a mortgage, and then leased the land to the Kyneton Brewing and Malting Company on the 30th May 1903. It is not known for what purpose they leased the land.[16]

On the 26th November 1907, a group of five graziers and a rate collector from the surrounding districts acquired the land. They were John Campbell, Charles Westblade, William Ferguson, Nicholas Taafe and Thomas Dwyer.[17] The group had written to the Department of Health on the 18th April 1907, proposing the erection of a Library Building at Mia Mia and it was to this end that they acquired the land.[18]

The Mia Mia Hall was built on the land soon afterwards, and opened in 1907. It is thought that the Hall was originally constructed as a Mechanics' Institute.[19] The committee had written to the Department of Health soon after the commencement of construction, seeking approval for the erection of the building without lining the walls or the ceiling. Costs for the construction had apparently blown out beyond the estimates of the committee, and cutting corners in construction was a means of reducing the expense of the building.[20] The Hall was built to accommodate one hundred people.[21]

Mechanics' Institutes were often a prominent feature in rural towns, and played a vital social and educational role amongst communities. Given the lack of venues for social functions in small towns, Mechanics' Institutes often provided an alternative venue for entertainment that differed from that of hotels and concert halls.[22] The Mechanics' Institute at Mia Mia incorporated a lending library and reading room, which have since been dismantled.[23]

The Mia Mia Public Hall was extended circa 1955, with the addition of a brick extension to one side of the building.

The hall at Mia Mia was transferred to the ownership of the Mia Mia Public Hall Inc. in February 1991.[24]

[1] Randell, J. O. (1985). *McIvor: A History of the Shire and the Township of Heathcote, Shire of McIvor*, p. 1.

[2] Spreadborough, Robert and Anderson, Hugh (1983). *Victorian Squatters*, Red Rooster Press, Ascot Vale, p.150

[3] Spreadborough & Anderson (1983), p. 31.

[4] Hewat, Tim (1983), *Bridge Over Troubled Waters, A History of the Shire of Strathfieldsaye*, Shire of Strathfieldsaye, Victoria, pp. 11 - 12.

[5] Hewat, Tim (1983), p. 18.

[6] Hewat, Tim (1983), p. 107.

[7] Certificate of Title, Vol. 300, Fol. 916.

[8] Certificate of Title, Vol. 300, Fol. 916.

[9] Certificate of Title, Vol. 300, Fol. 916.

[10] Parish Plan of the Parish of Spring Plains, undated.

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[11] Parish Plan of the Parish of Spring Plains, undated.

[12] Randell (1985), p. 196.

[13] Randell (1985), p. 218

[14] Randell, (1985), p. 320

[15] Certificate of title, Vol. 300, Fol. 916.

[16] Certificate of title, Vol. 300, Fol. 916.

[17] Certificate of title, Vol. 300, Fol. 916.

[18] Public Building File, Mechanics Hall Mia Mia, PB 2103, VPRS 7882/P/0001, Unit 000370, PROV, p. 1.

[19] Earth Tech Engineering Pty Ltd (2002), *Heathcote - Strathfieldsaye Thematic History*, City of Greater Bendigo, Bendigo, p. 49

[20] Public Building File, Mechanics Hall Mia Mia, PB 2103, VPRS 7882/P/0001, Unit 000370, PROV, p. 1.

[21] Public Building File, Mechanics Hall Mia Mia, PB 2103, VPRS 7882/P/0001, Unit 000370, PROV, p. 1.

[22] Earth Tech Engineering Pty Ltd (2002), p. 49

[23] P. Baragawanath, (1998) *Inventory of Mechanics Institutes in Victoria*, Dept of Natural Resources and Environment, East Melbourne, pp. 645-6.

[24] Certificate of Title, Vol. 300, Fol. 916.

Primary sources

Certificate of Title, Vol. 300, Fol. 916

Parish Plan of the Parish of Spring Plains, undated

Public Building File, Mechanics Hall Mia Mia, PB 2103, VPRS 7882/P/0001, Unit 000370, PROV

Secondary sources

Baragawanath, P (1998) *Inventory of Mechanics Institutes in Victoria*, Dept of Natural Resources and Environment, East Melbourne.

Earth Tech Engineering Pty Ltd (2002), *Heathcote - Strathfieldsaye Thematic History*, City of Greater Bendigo, Bendigo

Hewat, Tim (1983), *Bridge Over Troubled Waters, A History of the Shire of Strathfieldsaye*, Shire of Strathfieldsaye, Victoria

Randell, J. O. (1985). *McIvor: A History of the Shire and the Township of Heathcote*, Shire of McIvor

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Spreadborough, Robert and Anderson, Hugh (1983). *Victorian Squatters*, Red Rooster Press, Ascot Vale

Relevant Historical Australian Themes

8.0 Building community life

8.4 Forming community organisations

Description

Physical Description

The Mia Mia Hall is a key building in the small locality of Mia Mia, where many of the other buildings are widely dispersed. It is an important landmark for Mia Mia.

The Mia Mia Hall is a typical gable roofed hall with timber frame. The small four pane windows are set at a high sill level and the double front door opens directly into the main space with no porch. The roofing has been replaced with colorbond cladding and the walls have been reclad with aluminium. The barge decoration and finial that serves as a flagpole is the sole decoration. There is a brick extension to one side containing a toilet block.

Physical Condition

Good

Conservation Policy

Removal of the aluminium cladding and repairing weatherboards would enhance this building.

Comparative Analysis

The Mia Mia Hall is one of the earliest and best examples of halls in the study area. Other weatherboard halls are at Costerfield.

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

The Mia Mia Hall site, including all the fabric of the 1907 gable roofed hall with timber frame, is significant.

How is it significant?

The Mia Mia Hall is of historic, aesthetic and social significance to the City of Greater Bendigo.

Why is it significant?

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The site of the Mia Mia Hall is historically significant for its early association with the Westblade family who were involved in a number of important developments in the district, including early subdivision under the 1860s Land Acts, farming, land speculation, flour milling and quartz crushing. The Hall is of historical significance as a Mechanics' Institute and lending library. Although it has been altered by the brick extension, it is a key building in Mia Mia.

Criterion A

The Mia Mia Hall is socially significant for providing a venue for social, cultural and educational activities for the local community. Established as a Public Library and/or Mechanics' Institute, the Hall is an expressive symbol of the aspirations of local community to provide a public lending library and reading room for the surrounding district.

Criterion G

Assessment Against Criteria

HERCON CRITERIA

Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history. *Criterion A*

Possession of uncommon rare or endangers aspects of our cultural or natural history. *Criterion B*

Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history. *Criterion C*

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments.
Criterion D

Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics. *Criterion E*

Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period. *Criterion F*

Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of the continuing and developing cultural traditions.
Criterion G

Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history. *Criterion H*

Recommendations 2008

External Paint Controls

No

Internal Alteration Controls

No

Tree Controls

No

Fences & Outbuildings

No

Prohibited Uses May Be Permitted

No

Incorporated Plan

None Specified

Aboriginal Heritage Place

No

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Other Recommendations

It is recommended that the hall at 20 Valley Road, Mia Mia be added as an individual place to the Heritage Overlay of the Greater Bendigo City Planning Scheme with the schedule entry as shown above. The extent of registration is the whole of the property as defined by the title boundaries.