



Geelong Court House & Public Offices 32B Gheringhap Street

History

At the launching of this complex, the Minister for Public Works (Goudie) took the credit for the new complex, not it as '...not only a fine building but the most modern offices it is possible to produce in the city...'. But it was the old Geelong boy, Percy Everett (son of a leading Geelong coach-builder), who as Chief Architect for the Public Works Department of Victoria had left his distinctive mark on the building's design.¹ Nine government ministers attended the laying of the foundation stones, one of which commemorated the first Supreme Court house in Myers Street (1860). The ornate polychrome brick Police Court, built here in 1882, was retained but totally transformed for the new building.²

The project was to be finished in about eight months time (it was April 1937) but was not open until May 1938.³ Coinciding with the opening of the Hopetoun shipping channel extension⁴, this was a further gesture by the State Government of their intentions towards decentralization. Estimated to cost some £30,000 (furnished), it housed

three court rooms, a magistrate's room (doubling as a children's' court), and numerous government departments including public works, factories, lands, agriculture, State Rivers and Water Supply and forests. Geelong police station was also there, along with the police administration for the region. In opening the building, Dunstan (the Victorian Premier), was sure that Geelong residents and public servants alike would be grateful for the new centralized offices. In reply the mayor of Geelong, Brown, urged the government to continue the job and tidy up their 'back door' in Ryrie Street, where in his view, the state of the buildings was hardly in keeping with the City.⁵

Description

Showing in one sense a high standard of 'architectural manners,' Everett's design (particularly facing Gheringhap Street), takes on many of the classical attributes of the two earlier buildings (town hall, post office) in Gheringhap Street and probably harmonized successfully with the adjoining Little Malop Street sites (fire station, temperance hall), since demolished.

1 *ibid.*

2 see PWD drawings: *Geelong for Business and Pleasure* panorama

3 GA 14.4.37, CTHE

4 see Wynd, *Geelong the Pivot* p.56 ie. widened and deepened to cope with major industrial development facing the bay

5 *Age* 19.5.38 p14

City of Geelong Urban Conservation Study
Significant Sites

Adopting a traditional courthouse profile, based around the existing building, it possessed a raised two-storey height courtroom, a lower-level colonnaded porch and two flanking pavilions, the Gheringhap Street elevation achieving its contemporary character by simplicity of detail and the all-pervading Cordova-tiled hip-roof form. In Little Malop Street, a similar tripartite composition also mixed tradition with Modernism but with emphasis on the latter, with its vertical window strips echoing similar devices used on Everett's Wool and Textile School design at the Gordon Institute of the same era. Decorative metal work (grilles) underscores the architectural inspiration (Italian provincial) and provides a vehicle for distinctive detailing.

Inside, the contemporary Moderne theme is more evident, with plaster friezes, metal work and the era's typical Queensland timber veneers to doors and panels. Some early colours are evident in what is a generally original interior.

External Integrity

Generally original.

Streetscape

Today it complements both the town hall portico and the adjoining contemporary telephone exchange.

Significance

Historically, given its near original condition, it represents its construction period faithfully and hence its long-term public building role.

Architecturally, one of Everett's larger Courthouse designs and among his most successful, given its corner site and streetscape contribution. It possesses distinctive finishes and details for a public building (tiles, metal work) and contributes to a valuable public building precinct.