



Geelong Unity & Prudence Lodge, 79 Gheringhap Street

History

In 1846, some of Geelong's 'leading inhabitants' applied, to the English Grand Lodge for a warrant to form a Freemason's Lodge at Geelong.¹ It was granted in the following year to the applicants (William Timms, merchant; Robert Dunsford, merchant; William Hillyard, mechanic; William Haines, grazier; Joseph Austin, grazier; Thomas Downie, printer; P W Clement, merchant; George Lloyd, merchant; Frederick Hitchins, auctioneer; Charles Nantes, merchant; George Faircloth, banker; Andrew Love, clergyman; R D Shepherd; Henry Lawler; P Phillips and John Sheppard). In October, 1848, the Lodge was inaugurated.

Some 40 years later, the lodge formed a company to purchase a site at 84 Yarra Street, holding the first meeting there in December, 1887, and continuing there until 1927 when this building was completed. Worshipful Master, William H Smith, laid the foundation stone in November, 1926, and W C Kernot was the Chairman of Trustees.²

As early as 1919-20, J.A.Laird and Percy Everett (both lodge members) had prepared plans for a new building, after members' dissatisfaction with Yarra Street. They also prepared a renovation option for the old hall, which was proceeded with awaiting funds.³

Three years later, Geelong's 'Sister Lodges' were invited to unite to allow erection of a new temple to serve all of Geelong masons. New schemes were prepared but the

1 GA 30/11/26
2 GWB DRP3908; F.S.T
3 ibid.

interest of the other lodges waned. Nevertheless, the Unity & Prudence Lodge took up an option on this site '...an ideal site for a new temple: fronting as it did the east side of Gheringhap Street in a commanding high level position and situated in close proximity to the centre of the city, easily accessible by tram and train.'¹

Here they planned '...one of the architectural gems of Geelong.' Again new plans were prepared, as directed by Committee. The architectural team's plans (the team now included Brother Harold C Trigg) were accepted in August, 1926, and the Yarra Street property was auctioned.² Brother D A Muir's tender to build the temple was accepted in September. The design was to be innovative with 'features which have not been introduced in previous structures for similar purposes.' The Classical style chosen for its facade was not new, but it was to be three-storeys with an entrance portico in Roman Doric, 'surmounted by a large arched window with an enriched cornice above.' But instead of the usual sombre stuccoed exterior, a special manganese brick was chosen, with cement ornament.

The hall was a multi-purpose design, allowing its use by outside bodies and its servery, kitchen, cloakrooms and entry configuration were arranged for maximum efficiency. There was an 'orchestral platform,' but instead of being at one end of the hall it was on the north side, providing a more informal bandstand. Natural light and ventilation were enhanced by a 'lofty fibrous plaster ceiling enriched with Modern beamed and corniced divisions.'³

The lodge room was at the first level and also had a lofty ceiling. It was entered by a wide stair from the lobby, and commanded an 'extensive' view of the city, particularly from the balconette on the facade. Another 'social room' shared this level, but its independent stairway meant, again, that the building could be used by more than one group at a time.

Their Temple was thought a fitting and modern home for one of the State's oldest lodges.⁴

Description

Reminiscent of Percy Everett's Peace Memorial, the main facade possesses the conservative Classical revival framework expected of a Masonic Hall, but it is executed in a more innovative way than the comparable examples of the era. For example, the Masonic hall in Dandenong Road, Malvern, is a typical Classical revival, Neo-grec design, compared to the free treatment used here and on the Collingwood Masonic Temple.⁵

Composed in three parts, the centre bay holds the Doric porch and balconette, but the main element here is the tall-arched window above, configured as an exaggerated serlian motif.

Contemporary Greek revival elements, such as the lattice-pattern window mullions in the flanking window strips, connect the building with main-stream architectural work, such as the former Port Authority Building, Melbourne. Similarly, detailing is achieved structurally by

use of face-brick in patterns and projecting panels, rather than the traditional cement. The impressive verticality of the three-storeys on the facade translates to two on the side and rear elevations. Similarly, red-brick walling replaces the more expensive manganese, but the custom-pattern of the metal-framed window mullions is continued on the rear elevation.

(Interior not inspected, but assumed potentially notable).

External Integrity

Generally original.

Streetscape

Set in Geelong's public and ecclesiastical building domain (Gheringhap Street north of Myers), the hall takes on the imagery of its counterparts at the Rylie and Little Malop Street corners and opposite (St. Giles, Congregational Church, Post Office, Law Courts, Town Hall). Adjoining development, however, is unrelated to either the precinct or this building.

Significance

Architecturally, this Masonic hall shows a typically innovative approach to the strict iconography of the Masonic craft by two of Geelong's best-known architects, Percy Everett and J Angus Laird. It also represents the first structure to be custom-designed for the Geelong Lodge, which itself is one of the oldest in the State. It is remarkably well preserved externally and faithfully represents the aesthetic choices made by some of Geelong's foremost citizens of the time and one of its most celebrated designers, Percy Everett, as demonstrated in the praise meted out by the *Geelong Advertiser*. It also plays a role in Geelong's civic thoroughfare, Gheringhap Street, with its fine array of notable public and ecclesiastic structures.

1 ibid.
2 ibid.
3 ibid.
4 ibid.
5 1129

From: Terry Demeo
To: Colin Brown; Planning Development
Date: 10/17/99 11:17am
Subject: 79 gheringhap st geelong.... masonic temple

Everyone

Heritage victoria have sent us a copy of correspondence they have sent to the owners of this property advising that they have received an application for the property to be nominated to the state register . No formal action has been taken to date.

If you have enquiries in respect to its development / use potential please keep this in mind .

thanks

terry d

*This place was not added
to Victorian Heritage Register*

DD.