

GEELONG CITY 'C' CITATIONS

Site Name: Former Liverpool & London & Globe Insurance Co
Building (now Savvas Restaurant)

Project File No: 1049

Address: 51 Moorabool Street Geelong 3220

Approx. Date: 1856

Integrity: High

Significance Level: C (Local)

Photograph No: 09.18

Survey Date: March 2002



History

This site at 51 Moorabool Street, Geelong, is located on part of Crown Allotment no.9, Section 9, of the Geelong Town Plan of 1858. The land was originally owned by James Ford Strachan.

James Strachan of Hobart Town bought the Crown land in 1846 for 338 pounds. He sold the land in 1849 to Samuel Eades who in turn sold it, together with the use of a private lane at the rear, to William Smith and George Kirk. Kirk relinquished his share to Edward Smith in January 1855.

On 2 August 1856, the Geelong architects, Backhouse and Reynolds invited tenders closing 3 September 1856 for the construction of a 2 storey stone and brick store at the above location in Moorabool Street for Smith Brothers, leather merchants. The building boasted 5 rooms and was completed to allow the brothers to move into the new premises from their previous address in Market Square on 11 April 1857. In 1858, the Bellerine Ward Rate Book described the building as a double shop, with a loft over and office, and valued it at 300 pounds per annum.

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In mid 1860, the property was sold to Philip William Skinner Miles, Edward Peach William Miles, and Henry Cruger William Miles, who held it briefly, before it was purchased by James Cowie in May 1864. By 1872, Cowie seems to have altered the store internally to accommodate 2 offices and one room and then it was again put up for sale. The new owner was the Liverpool, London and Globe Insurance Company, which was to own and occupy the premises for the next 80 years or more.

By 1896, the Insurance Company had installed one of its insurance agents, Edward John George, in permanent residence on the site by increasing the number of upstairs rooms from 3 to 7. Edward George lived there from c.1895 to the early 1920s.

In the 1920s, the Insurance Company decided to sublet the upstairs spaces. Tenants during the period from 1930 to 1950 included Edward Bechervaise & Son, Accountants, Kate Hague, householder, Clive Harrison, Customs Agent, E.J.Coleman & Co., Manufacturers' Agent, and Dreyfus & Co., Woolbuyers. Some of the Insurance Company managers during the same period were Sampbell Sellers, Alfred William Curtis and Rae Athol Sinclair.

By 1960, the property had been acquired by George Alexander and Veronica Rhonda Goodwin, with woolbuyers, Bennett and Gilman, and, in the late 1960s, Lempriere (Aust.) Pty., Ltd., occupying the building. Several changes were made to sanitary facilities and fittings in 1961, 1975 and 1985. In recent years the building has been used as a restaurant, under the name of Savvas.

Benjamin Backhouse was born in Ipswich, Suffolk in 1829, the son of a stonemason and builder. He emigrated to Victoria in 1853 with his wife, Lydia. In 1854-55, Backhouse acquired a draftsman trained in England, William Reynolds, who became a partner in 1856. In 1855, Backhouse was honorary secretary of the Geelong Society of Architects, Civil Engineers and Surveyors. In 1860, both Backhouse and Reynolds returned to England, where Reynolds apparently remained, although Backhouse and his family re-emigrated, this time to Brisbane in 1861 where he prospered as an architect and became an alderman.

Other surviving buildings designed by Backhouse and Reynolds in 1856 include:

- * National School, Dana Street, Ballarat;
- * Matthew Flinders Girls School, Geelong;
- * Merchiston Hall, Garden Street, East Geelong;

Description

The former Liverpool & London & Globe Insurance Company building (now Savvas Restaurant), 51 Moorabool Street, Geelong, is situated next to the Wool Exchange Hotel. The building takes up the bulk of the site and abuts the front Moorabool Street boundary.

The symmetrical, two storey, early Victorian Free Classical styled building is characterised by a crowning rudimentary parapet with a raised central rectangular section. The parapet is adorned by moulded stringcourses in the upper reaches.

The first floor comprises an early arched tripartite windows openings, highlighted by decorative architraves supported by elaborate consoles. The window openings have early timber framed double hung windows within. The arch of the larger central window is punctuated by an early decorative keystone, above which is an introduced timber flagpole. Below the windows is an introduced cantilevering concave verandah.

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Of particular interest is the intact ground floor facade. It has early smoothly-rusticated flanking pilasters capped with rectangular heads having projecting arched rustication above the introduced verandah. Between the pilasters is a three-bayed composition of arched openings supported by rectangular stop chamfered pilasters on rectilinear pedestals. The central arched bay has an early door opening with timber and glazed French doors and a timber framed arched transom window above. The flanking openings have fixed, timber framed, 12 paned windows with arched timber framed three paned transom windows. Below the windows are rendered base panels.

The exposed northern side wall of the building has a plain wall that has recently been re-rendered.

Behind the front parapet is a hipped roof form clad in galvanised corrugated steel. The rear wall construction is painted brick and there is an early shallow arched window opening having brick voussoirs and an early timber framed double hung window. The stairs, door opening and single store skillion addition at the rear have been introduced.

Statement of Cultural Significance

The former Liverpool & London & Globe Insurance Company building, 51 Moorabool Street, has significance as one of few intact mid 19th century commercial buildings with a largely intact shopfront in Geelong. Built in 1856 for Smith Brothers, leather merchants to a design by the Geelong architects Backhouse and Reynolds, it was later owned by the Liverpool & London & Globe Insurance Company. The building appears to be in good condition when viewed from the street.

The former Liverpool & London & Globe Insurance Company building at 51 Moorabool Street is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level. It demonstrates original or early design qualities of an early Victorian Free Classical style. These qualities include the crowning rudimentary parapet with the raised central rectangular section, moulded parapet stringcourses, arched first floor tripartite windows openings, decorative first floor window architraves supported by elaborate consoles, decorative keystone that punctuates the central window arch, and the ground floor facade with its flanking smoothly-rusticated pilasters capped with rectangular heads having projecting arched rustication, and the three-bayed composition of arched openings supported by rectangular stop chamfered pilasters on rectilinear pedestals. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the timber framed double hung first floor windows, central arched ground floor doorway with timber and glazed French doors and timber framed and arched transom window above, arched timber framed and fixed, 12 paned ground floor windows with arched timber framed 3 paned transom windows, rendered base panels below the ground floor windows, plain rendered north wall, hipped roof form clad in galvanised corrugated steel, rear brick wall construction, shallow arched window opening with brick voussoirs and the rear timber framed double hung window.

The former Liverpool & London & Globe Insurance Company building at 51 Moorabool Street is historically significant at a LOCAL level. It has associations with the early development of commercial buildings and companies in Geelong in the mid 19th century, and is a relatively intact and unusual legacy of these developments. In particular, this building has associations with the Smith Brothers, leather merchants and original owners who instigated construction in 1856. The building has further associations with the early Geelong architects, Backhouse and Reynolds, who were responsible for the design. There are also long-term associations with the Liverpool, London and Globe Insurance Company between 1872 and c.1960.

Overall, the former Liverpool & London & Globe Insurance Company building is of LOCAL significance.

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References

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