

Manchester Unity Hall & Offices 215-217 Moorabool Street

History

One of the colony's most popular friendly societies, the Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows (MUIOOF), acquired this site in 1868 for conversion to a hall¹. Immediately prior to its conversion, the site held a timber shop, occupied by William Fox². After acquisition, Fox still occupied the site but now in a brick two-storey produce store with the lodge rooms, an attic, a rear store and cellar³. In 1872, J. Rowsell advertised the lower storey of the hall for lease, noting that for the last 13 years it had been used by Fox as a corn store.

Meanwhile a waxworks exhibition was staged in the hall in the same year. In 1873, the Good Templars left the Little Malop Street temperance hall to meet in this hall and in the same year, the Geelong branch of the Victorian Builders & Contractors Association held their first annual meeting there⁴.

Thomas Bartlett took the lease of the commercial part of the site in the 1870s which now included an adjoining timber shop⁵. By 1881 Thear & Bartlett were in the timber shop and John McNaughton (agent) in this building⁶. The part timber, part brick shop was still occupied by Thear & Bartlett in 1890⁷. This century, Esther James (milling) and Farrow & Plumber were occupiers⁸. Evolved in Great Britain to provide among other things

Evolved in Great Britain to provide among other things health insurance and education for the working classes, friendly societies found a sounder legal footing here after 1855 legislation which allowed for their controlled expansion in the colony. The Independent Order of Oddfellows was among the first of the British societies to set up in Australia, creating a Sydney lodge in 1836. The Geelong United Friendly Societies building in Ryrie Street is another reminder of these invaluable social institutions.

Descri Lion

Suggesting some form of redevelopment late last century, the facade of this building resembles that of the Hibernian

- 1 INV. Vol.3/9
- 2 RB1867-8, 28-9 3 RB1868-9, 31
 - GA 12.9.72; GA 12.5.73; GA 17.9.73
- VB1875, 28
- RB1881,27-8
- 7 RB1890,21-2
- 8 1910,23-4
- 9 Australians A Historical Dictionary p.164

City of Geelong Urban Conservation Study Significant Sites

Club (former YMCA building) in Ryrie Street which was rebuilt 1891-2 (q.v.). Remarkably intact for a 19th. century Geelong commercial building, the facade still has its ground-floor rusticated pier divisions, each demarcating a distinct use: the retail show-window on the north, the hall entrance in the centre and the offices on the south. The upper facade has ornate cement detail arranged around segment and fully-arched openings, each opening type differing in size to fit between the pilasters which follow the line of the ground-floor piers. Architraves, blind oculi and colonettes around openings add to this effect. Above the cornice, the parapet continues the piers as supports for arched and raised parapet entablatures. Between each, garlands hang to provide inverse arch shapes, countering those of the parapet above.

External Integrity

Generally original except for new doors to the end openings, and the addition of signs and a canopy.

Streetscape

Relates closely to 205, 209 and 211 Moorabool Street, all from the 19th century and forming a commercial streetscape within precinct 5.4.

Significance

Historically linked with the friendly society movement which provided benefits and education to the working classes and, as a hall, the venue for other Geelong community groups for meetings such as the Geelong Young Men's Association.

Architecturally, a remarkably complete and adeptly designed facade which has valuable cemented detailing and rare ground floor elements. If the facade is from the 1868 reconstruction, it is made more valuable as early design sophistication.

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