



St. Mary's Hall 162- Myers Street

History

Archdeacon Slattery made a start on promoting a 'school hall' for Catholic children in June 1891, using a design by Watts & Durran.¹ In the lean time of the early 1890s, 17 contractors vied for the job. Melbourne builders, House & Sims, tendered £4006 to win the commission.²

The building started the following August and opened in February 1892. At a cost of £5200, the hall measured 125 x 56 feet, (cruciform plan) with cloakrooms on either side. It could accommodate a staggering 1350 persons (320 in a 'spacious and lofty' gallery) and had an ample stage measuring 44 x 21 feet.³ The concert stage was fitted with 'scenic accessories', was well lit and vented, and was highly accessible for performers.⁴

St. Mary's Parish lacked good schools in this period. The boys' school (c1868) was old, cramped and occupied the site set aside for St. Mary's completion. St. Mary's Hall served as classrooms for the girls. In 1918 Fr. McKenna started a funding drive to finance new schools to replace

the old school in St. Mary's grounds.⁵ St. Mary's Hall was remodeled, after 30 years as a school, and reopened by Archbishop Mannix in 1919.⁶

Description

Some of the Fruit of Fifty Years shows this grand building soon after its construction, revealing that little has changed since but the substitution of four-metre chain-wire fence for an ornamental timber picket and paling front fence. The cement work was also lighter in colour and the painted details in different tones.

Elevated in the 'pagan' Greek temple form, the chosen style is unusual for the Catholic Church, being more akin to Baptist or Congregational designs. However, it followed loosely in the classical Baroque revival manner of St. Francis Xavier's College, Kew, and, more closely, the impressive Sacred Heart Church, Rathdowne Street, Carlton (1897-8); the architects, Reed Smart & Tappin, being responsible. This latter example provoked the observation that it was '...in style a departure from the usual, ecclesiastical architecture of the colonies, being Renaissance and...resembling...Roman churches.'⁷ St.

1 MUA; SOFFY p.52f

2 A 22.8.91

3 ibid.

4 GA 1.3.92/2

5 A 8/6/18-9

6 A 11.10.19/7

7 SOFFY, p.24f

City of Geelong Urban Conservation Study
Significant Sites

Mary's Hall preceded the above examples but post-dated the only other major classical church at St. Kilda West.

External Integrity

Generally original except for unsympathetic replacement of the front picket fence.

Streetscape

Closely related to the adjoining Catholic school and the commencement of a street elevation of architecturally important designs.

Significance

Architecturally, an early example of the classicising influence on the Catholic Church which was to translate into the more common Free Romanesque revivals of the early 1900s (i.e., A.A. Fritsch), and part of a significant public building group along Myers Street South. Historically, a long term public building in Geelong.