

GEELONG CITY 'C' CITATIONS

Site Name: Purnell's Chambers

Project File No: 1110

Address: 26-30A Ryrie Street Geelong 3220

Approx. Date: 1923

Integrity: High

Significance Level: C (Local)

Photograph No: 03.07

Survey Date: March 2002



History

This site at 26-30A Ryrie Street, Geelong, is located on Lots 3-5, LP34728, which is parts of Crown Allotment 1, Section 46, of the Geelong Town Plan of 1923. The land originally belonged to Towle and Turpin.

The six brick shops at this location were built in 1923 for Frederick Charles Purnell, architect, of Hermitage Road, Newtown, replacing the former Purnell & Sons Timber Yard.

Frederick Charles Purnell was born in Geelong in 1868, the son of William Purnell and his wife, Margaret, nee Lamb. He was educated at Geelong College before studying architecture and joining his father and brother as an architectural draftsman. He travelled extensively during his architectural studies, and was a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Architects. In 1899 he enlisted in the Geelong militia battery of the Garrison Artillery. During the First World War he commanded the A.I.F. Camp at Geelong Racecourse, was promoted through the ranks to that of Lieutenant-Colonel by 1917, and served in France in the initial tank service until January 1919. After the war, Frederick became the first Secretary of the Geelong and District Branch of the Town Planning Association which formed in 1924. This organisation was responsible for tree plantations along the Melbourne Road for 15 miles. Purnell was very active in arousing public interest in this

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venture, and in organizing volunteer helpers. His other interests included playing an active role in the Geelong College Old Collegians' Association, of which he became President, and participation in the Old Collegians Choir, which he organized in 1921. Married with three sons, Frederick Purnell died on 10 February 1953.

Purnell was anxious to blend the new shops with his existing corner shop, and achieved this by extending the same tiles and a verandah across the fronts of all the buildings. The suite of shops became known as "Purnell's Chambers". Purnell retained ownership of the buildings until his death, whereupon they were administered by his Trust Estate until c. 1980. There have been some interesting and notable tenants in these shops over the years, including D.S. McKeown, a radio distributor (in shop 28A in 1934), the Communist Party of Australia (in shop 26A in 1950), the Commonwealth Electoral Office (in shops 30 and 30A from c.1941 to 1957), and long-time tenant in shop 26, Richard Connoley, hairdresser, from at least 1960 to the present day. In addition, there have been dressmakers, a French Polisher, a locksmith, an estate agent, a furniture retailer, a saddler, and an internal decorator. In 1973, it appears that the shops were sold to J.T. Franklin & Co. Pty. Ltd., who may have resold them to their incumbent tenants by 1980. During this period the number of shops was reduced to three by removing 26A, 28A, and 30A as separate addresses. The current owners of shops 26, 28, and 30, Richard Gerard Connoley, Tony Arico, and R.E.Ramia, have occupied their respective premises since at least the early 1990s.

Description

The Purnell's Chambers building, 26-30A Ryrie Street, Geelong, comprises an unusual intact set of 6 shops fronting Ryrie Street. The single storey, rendered brick, interwar Free commercial styled complex is characterised by a plain rendered parapet with a moulded and unpainted red brick dentillated capping. The parapet is punctuated by striped rendered and unpainted red brick pilasters crowned by rendered piers having projecting cornices. These pilasters and piers accentuate the six bayed composition of the ground floor shopfronts, which are separated from the first floor by cantilevered verandahs.

The shopfronts are largely intact, with the six bayed composition articulated into three sets of flanking early metal framed shopfronts between early central double ingoes with timber and glazed doors. The ingoes are adorned with early metal screens at ceiling level. The shopfronts also have early highlights above, and apart from the shop at 30A Ryrie Street, these highlights are painted over. The doorways also have early transom windows, several of which are also painted over. The shopfronts have surrounding, early glazed tiled walls and bases, some of which are also painted over.

Most of the introduced signage on the complex is appropriately confined to the valance hoardings of the verandahs or on the shopfront windows. There are two inappropriate sign boards projecting above the verandah along the east end.

Behind the front parapet are a series of early gabled roof forms clad in galvanised corrugated iron separated by projecting brick party walls with cement rendered cappings. The building takes up the full area of the site, with the rear boundary wall constructed of unpainted and bagged brick.

Statement of Cultural Significance

The Purnell's Chambers building, 26-30A Ryrie Street, Geelong, has significance as an unusual and intact complex of six early shops designed in a Federation commercial style. Built in 1923 for Frederick Purnell, architect (to his design), the building appears to be in fair condition.

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The Purnell's Chambers building, 26-30A Ryrie Street, is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level. It demonstrates original design qualities of an interwar Free commercial style, with its unusual set of six shops of high integrity. These qualities include the six bayed composition articulated into three sets of flanking metal framed shopfronts between central double ingoes with timber and glazed doors, metal screened ingo decoration at ceiling level, shopfront highlights, transom windows above the doorways, and the glazed tiled surrounds. Other intact qualities include the single storey height, rendered brick wall construction, plain rendered parapet with the moulded and unpainted red brick dentillated capping, striped rendered and unpainted red brick parapet pilasters crowned by rendered piers having projecting cornices, series of gable roof forms clad in galvanised corrugated iron separated by projecting unpainted brick party walls with cement rendered cappings, and the rear brick boundary wall.

The Purnell's Chambers building, 26-30A Ryrie Street, is historically significant at a LOCAL level. It is associated with commercial developments in Geelong during the interwar (c.1920s-1940s) period. In particular, the building has associations with Frederick Charles Purnell, original owner and architect, who designed it in 1923. As well as being an architect, Purnell held important roles in several community organisations, including the Geelong and District Town Planning Association and the Geelong College Old Collegians' Association.

Overall, the Purnell's Chambers building, 26-30A Ryrie Street, is of LOCAL significance.

References

Reports and Drainage Plans, Barwon Water profits system, 1923, 1973.
Voters' Roll, Kardinia Ward, 1992, Geelong Historical Records Centre.
Sands & McDougall's Directory of Geelong, 1972, Geelong Historical Records Centre.
Sands & McDougall's "Invicta" Geelong Directory, 1968, Geelong Historical Records Centre.
Geelong City Council Rate Books (Kardinia Ward), 1923-1960, Geelong Historical Records Centre.
Town Plan of Geelong 1923, Public Records Office, Melbourne.
Purnell, L.A., The Purnell Family History, 1990, Geelong Historical Records Centre.
The Geelong Advertiser, 11 February 1953, Geelong Historical Records Centre.
Notes from L. Huddle on Purnell Chambers, Ryrie Street (undated).