

GEELONG CITY 'C' CITATIONS

Site Name: Former Hopetoun Chambers Building **Project File No:** 1123

Address: 135-139 Ryrie Street Geelong 3220

Approx. Date: 1891

Integrity: Moderate

Significance Level: C(Local)

Photograph No: 03.14

Survey Date: March 2002



History

The former Hopetoun Chambers building, 135-139 Ryrie Street, Geelong, was erected in 1891 to a design by the Geelong architects, Watts and Durran for G.F. Belcher. J.C. Taylor and Sons were awarded the building contract. The building was named in honour of Victoria's new Governor, Lord Hopetoun.

The construction of the "Hopetoun Chambers" was completed by 22 August, 1891, with a further contract let for the creation of a lightweight iron verandah from a Brunswick foundry (possibly Dawsons) which was to extend from Thacker's Printers, next door to the Hopetoun Chambers on the west side, along Ryrie Street and around the corner at Purdie's shop, down Moorabool Street to Brownbill's shop. Internally, the building comprised three shops on the ground floor, each with a 60ft frontage to Ryrie Street and each with an office at the rear and a right-of-way on to Little Malop Street. The first lessees of these shops were A.E. Kirwood, Messrs. Freedman and Wartzki, and Charles Brown. On the first floor were three suites of offices facing Ryrie Street, one of which was occupied by G.F. Belcher, and four single offices at the rear, divided from the front offices by a passage 5ft wide, at the western end of which was a toilet. Entry to the upstairs rooms was from Ryrie Street. The building was constructed of brick, on a concrete foundation, with a bluestone basement and cement rendered façade.

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George Frederick Belcher was born in Dublin on 10 January 1823. He migrated to Tasmania on the ship "Louisa Campbell" at the age of 16, arriving in Hobart in February 1839. He departed almost immediately for Melbourne, arriving there in time to for the funeral of John Batman. His first residence in Melbourne was John Batman's first house, located at the corner of William and Collins Streets. In 1843 he joined a party droving cattle to Adelaide, where he saw Sturt set out on his last expedition to Central Australia in search of an inland sea. In 1845, Belcher selected the whole of the Lake Hindmarsh area in the Wimmera, a tract of land 7 miles long, including the present-day town of Nhill, which he named. After 12 months on the land, he took a position in the Sub-Treasury in Melbourne, receiving gold deliveries from the escorts. In 1854 he was appointed Sub-Treasurer and gold receiver at Geelong, a position he held for 15 years. After his retirement, he became a broker and land agent, acquiring some of the most valuable properties in Geelong. Among houses he occupied were "Adzar" in Highton, "Allanvale" at Leopold, and Merchiston Hall at Eastern Beach.

Belcher was a member of the Geelong Town Council for a number of years, serving as mayor from 1873 to 1875, and as a member of the Legislative Council from 1875 to 1886. He was appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1867, and Vice-Consul to Sweden, Norway and Denmark in 1871 and 1880. He was director of the Geelong Gas Company for 36 years, serving as Chairman for a time. He was also a member of the first committee of the Mechanic's Institute, Melbourne Athenaeum Theatre, council of Geelong Grammar School (where his sons were educated), and of Christ Church, being the prime instigator and supporter of the new Anglican Church of St. Matthew's in East Geelong. He was also a prominent philanthropist, donating one tenth of his income to a range of charities, including the Mission School in Yarra Street.

Belcher was married three times - to Julia Maria Pepper (with whom he had seven children), Frederica Bayley Thorne (with whom he had four children), and to Florence Augusta Thorne (without issue). He died on 23 November 1909 aged 86 years, and was buried at the Eastern Cemetery.

Description

The former Hopetoun Chambers building, 135-139 Ryrie Street, Geelong, is set on the central commercial area of the city, near the corner of Ryrie and Moorabool Streets.

The symmetrical, two storey, rendered brick, Late Victorian Free Classical styled building is characterised by a central pedimented first floor bay and two flanking bays having early paired timber framed double hung windows with narrow label moulds and plain architraves. The central bay is distinguished by the crowning dentillated pediment that is supported by an entablature with the sign that reads "Hopetoun Chambers", which is in turn supported by rectilinear and panelled pilasters with stylised capitals. Within the bay are a pair of arched window openings with early timber framed double hung windows. These windows are separated by a rudimentary Tuscan pilaster and flanked by wide panelled stylised piers. Other early decorative features of the central bay include the incised panels that flank the window arches, decorative keystones that punctuate the window arches, the "1891" sign within the crowning pediment, and the decorative motif adorning the pediment. Other early features of the first floor include the balustraded parapet that adorns the rooftop, projecting cornice below the parapet, projecting stringcourses, blind balustrades and incised panelled boxed below the windows, and the projecting pilasters with incised panelling, and projecting corbels and square brackets that flank the building.

Separating the first from the ground floor is an introduced cantilevering verandah.

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Although the form of the ground floor shopfronts appears to be early (including the ingoes), the ground floor appears to have been greatly altered.

Beyond the main facade, the building has three early shallow hipped roof forms clad in dark painted galvanised corrugated iron. At least two early unpainted Hawthorn brick chimneys adorn the rear roofline, while the rear wall construction is also of early Hawthorn brickwork and the early timber framed double hung windows have shallow-arched heads adorned by early brick voussoirs. The rear projecting skillion wing also appears to be early.

Statement of Cultural Significance

The former Hopetoun Chambers building, 135-139 Ryrie Street, Geelong, is significant as a largely intact and surviving commercial example of the Late Victorian Classical style. Built in 1891 for G.F. Belcher, it was designed by the Geelong architects Watts and Durran and represents the developments in commercial building in Geelong in the late 19th century.

The former Hopetoun Chambers building at 135-139 Ryrie Street is architecturally significant at a LOCAL level. It demonstrates original design qualities of a late Victorian Free Classical style. These qualities include the symmetrical 3-bayed first floor composition, two flanking first floor bays having paired timber framed double hung windows with narrow label moulds and plain architraves, central first floor bay with the crowning dentillated pediment, entablature with the sign that reads "Hopetoun Chambers", rectilinear and panelled pilasters with stylised capitals that support the entablature and pediment, pair of arched window openings with timber framed double hung windows, rudimentary Tuscan pilaster that separates the arched windows, and the flanking, wide panelled stylised piers. Other intact or appropriate qualities include the two storey height, rendered brick wall construction, incised panels that flank the window arches, decorative keystones that punctuate the window arches, "1891" sign within the crowning pediment, decorative motif adorning the pediment, balustraded parapet that adorns the rooftop, projecting cornice below the parapet, projecting stringcourses, blind balustrades and incised panelled boxed below the windows, projecting pilasters with incised panelling and projecting corbels and square brackets that flank the building, and the forms (including the ingoes) of the ground floor shopfronts. The three shallow hipped roof forms clad in dark painted galvanised corrugated iron, unpainted Hawthorn brick chimneys at the rear, and the rear Hawthorn brickwork, timber framed double hung windows with shallow-arched heads and brick voussoirs, and the projecting brick skillion also contribute to the significance of the place.

The former Hopetoun Chambers building at 135-139 Ryrie Street is historically significant at a LOCAL level. It is associated with commercial developments in Geelong in the late 19th century. In particular, this building has associations with G.F. Belcher, original owner who instigated construction in 1891 to a design by the Geelong architects, Watts and Durran. Belcher was a prominent figure in Geelong, serving on the Geelong Town Council, Geelong Gas Company, Mechanics' Institute, Melbourne Athenaeum Theatre and the council of the Geelong Grammar School. A member of Christ Church, Belcher had also worked for the Sub-Treasury in Melbourne and Geelong in the mid 1850s.

Overall, the former Hopetoun Chambers building at 135-139 Ryrie Street is of LOCAL significance.

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References

- D. Rowe, 'Architecture of Geelong 1860-1900', B. Arch Thesis, School of Architecture & Building, Deakin University, 1991.
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- Geelong Advertiser, 22 August 1891, and 24 November 1909, Geelong Historical Records Centre.
- Huddle, L., Ryrie Streetscape map.
- Investigator, Journal of the Geelong Historical Society, Volume 27, 1992, Geelong Historical Records Centre.