

Shops & Offices 206-214 Ryrie Street

History

Architect, Eric R Peck, of Hare & Hare, Collins Street, designed this building for the Yarra Street Methodist Trust in 1927. This was in the same period that Hare & Hare designed the first stage of the Eastern Beach bathing complex (stairway, fountain). Peck was an old boy of the Yarra Street church.¹

At the commencement of the great World Depression, the *Geelong Advertiser* August, 1927, announced that the 'principal shopping area in Ryrie Street is to extend east of the Geelong Theatre...'² A grand scheme was proposed, costing some £31,880, which would put shops, office suites, clubrooms and a block of 'modern flats' along the frontage formerly occupied by the Sunday School. The first (and final) stage was five of the fifteen shops intended, with offices at first floor level. This would cost £19,800. External wall-finishes were a 'special' cement (white cement mixed with tinted washed sand for a stone-

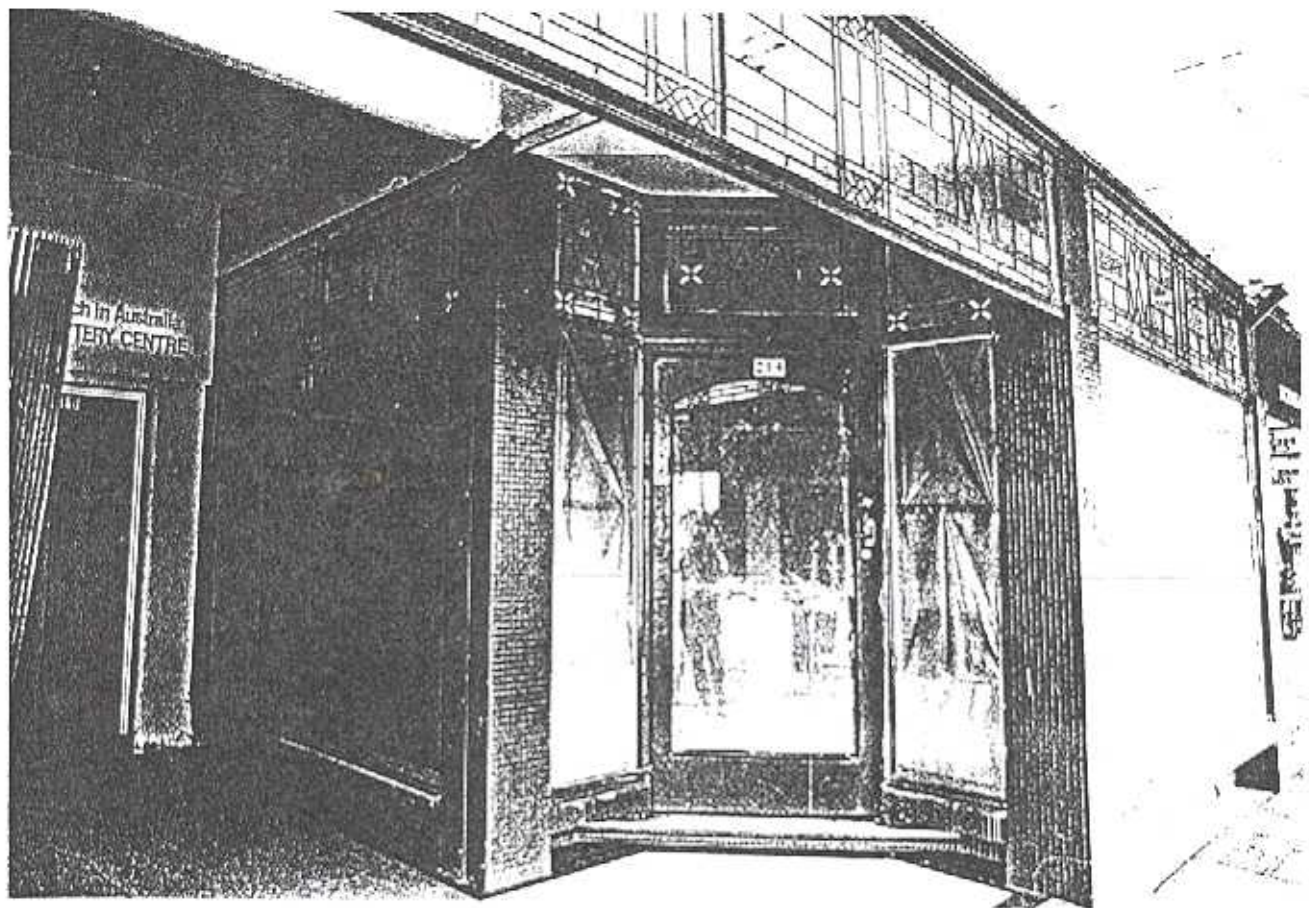
like render) custom-designed cement mouldings and the office floors would be framed in steel to allow total flexibility in planning the subdivision of what would be one large open space.

The shopfronts would be framed in metal, with an Italian black marble facing (tiled over since) and internal joinery in polished mahogany, a fairly standard array of finishes for the period but costly to reproduce today. The street verandah would be 88 feet long, cantilevering, and its fascia would be of moulded metal and the soffit of pressed bronze sheet.³

The second stage would be two-storey self-contained two-bedroom flats or apartments. While flats were still a new concept in Geelong, the 'flat' issue was being canvassed at that very moment. Mr. Gullet (MHR and prominent Wesleyan) had already spoken out on the need for flats to economically house the people, drawing comments made in Geelong by the then Premier (Hogan) who said that he, personally, did not like flats.⁴

Shop tenants over the years have included: in 206, John Kayser (a confectioner conveniently close to the Geelong Theatre); Clarence Mills, another confectioner, in 208;

¹ GWB DRP3941
² GA 9/8/27, p.4
ibid.
ibid.



the costumers, Bryant & Lane, in 210-214; and, more recently, Red Ramia (then tailor, draper) in 210-212.¹

Description

Where the Sunday School once stood, at the rear of these shops, is now vacant land but, in 1927, when the development was planned, it stood hardly two metres from the rear wall.²

True to the architect's intention, the upper facade has a cement finish (now painted over), pressed cement detailing in the form of panels and cartouches, and an overall trabeated pattern with symmetry about a central arched serlian motif and a raised parapet entablature. Wrought iron balustrading emulates a balconette just above the canopy.

Compared, for example, with the Masonic Hall (q.v.) in Gheringhap Street (similar period), it is far more restrained in the same Modern Classical revival. The upper-level windows are still multi-paned with borders and the shop windows below are relatively complete, particularly the lead-light transome lights which extend over the doorway of 214 and along the passage to the office entry at 216.

External Integrity

Air units have been added to the upper windows (3); shopfront finishes have been replaced in an unrelated manner; the verandah soffit appears to have been re-

placed; and some of the leaded transomes have been sheeted over.

Streetscape

A continuation of the Ryrie Street commercial precinct, it concurs with the Edwardian Baroque revival of the Geelong Theatre (now covered) and many of the similarly formed and detailed buildings to the west, such as Bell's Buildings (1916).³

Significance

Architecturally, a typical commercial elevation for the period, but of interest for its boast of clear-span office spaces (atypical) and the greater multi-use scheme, of which it was the first stage. It is of interest as the work of the architects who also designed the notable Eastern Beach first stage.

Historically, the church's multi-use scheme proposed is of interest for its seemingly benevolent approach to property development where cheap housing (flats) was to be provided in stage two (never carried out), presumably to be paid for by stage one. The site is of further interest as once being part of the land granted for church use and occupied over a long period by the Wesleyan Sunday School.

1 D1930-61
2 GWB DRP3941
3 Precinct 5.03